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BACK NUMBERS

¶ The other writings of 'Stet,' issued under his patronymic, fall into two classes : the announced but so far unachieved, and the remaindered. The two classes will eventually be amalgamated, in the latter category, when a *Retrospectus* will be issued. For 'Time, which antiquates antiquaries,' will make him in due course a Back Number.

BACK NUMBERS

by

“STET”

of

The ‘Saturday Review’

LONDON

CONSTABLE & CO LTD

1929

PUBLISHED BY
Constable & Company Limited
London W.C. 2

BOMBAY
CALCUTTA MADRAS
LEIPZIG

Oxford University
Press

TORONTO
The Macmillan Company
of Canada, Limited

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

TO
GERALD BARRY AND IVY DAVISON,
IN AFFECTION, AND IN MEMORY OF
LABOUR AND LAUGHTER ON
THE BEST OF ALL PAPERS

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

THESE papers are but the equivalent of table-talk. Elsewhere I have written criticism which, whatever its defects, was produced in an immensely careful endeavour to relate my most recent experiences of the authors under notice to my permanent convictions about them, vivifying, as well as I could, my habit of thought about them by fresh exposure to their influence, and checking the raptures and revulsions of the moment by what over the whole period of my commerce with them they had been to me. But these are so many of the half-holidays of a critic. Here I speak frankly, often rashly, out of the mood of the moment ; and where there is reference back, it is not to myself in other and more responsible hours, but to what was said on the subject by others, long ago, in the Review for which I write.‡

Singly, these ' Back Numbers ' found some favour with colleagues ; I hope that, collected, they may at least stir up Victorian memories.

I am indebted to the *Saturday Review* for permission to reprint my work. In doing so, I have not hesitated to behave as if my signature were Dele instead of

STET.

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GEORGE MEREDITH

MEREDITH, Browning, and Donne are the three great malcontents of English poetry. In their several ways, they bring to poetry what it will not accept without protest and ask of it what it cannot yield. They will not abandon themselves to the wind which bloweth where it listeth; they force their waking observation into the dream, and interrupt their own music. It is not that theirs is the unprofitable quarrel of otherwise gifted men with the instrument they cannot use: each, for all his offences, is a master of it.

Ben Jonson's justified remark that Donne deserved hanging for not respecting the nature of English verse is accompanied by his equally justified remark that for some things Donne is the first poet in the world. Browning, though he writes verse that would set false teeth on edge, is, when he chooses, a great master of difficult metres, and beautifully musical in the simple, and has written at times perhaps the most melodiously *talking* verse in the language. Meredith, when we have give half the metrical credit of 'Love in the Valley' to George Darley, is clearly a consummate if capricious artist in verse. For one out of twenty exhibits, look at 'Phœbus with Admetus':

You with shelly horns, rams ! and promontory goats;
You whose browsing beards dip in coldest dew

S.B.N.

A

Bulls that walk the pastures in kingly-flashing coats !
 Laurel, ivy, vine, wreathed for feasts not few !
 You that build the shade-roof, and you that court the
 rays,

You that leap besprinkling the rock stream-rent :
 He has been our fellow, the morning of our days :
 Us he chose for housemates, and this way went.

God ! of whom music
 And song and blood are pure,
 The day is never darkened
 That had thee here obscure.

Assuredly it is no technical trouble that sets Meredith quarrelling with poetry. His trouble, never permanently overcome, is that he is in no category. Teutonic, Gallic, English ; a philosopher of sorts, a humorist of many sorts, a discontented novelist, a discontented poet ; and, alas, a showman of himself : what literary form can accommodate such a writer ?

To me it seems his first thought was wise, and that of his prose fiction the most satisfactory, though not the greatest, thing was 'The Shaving of Shagpat.' Extravaganza was of all modes the one most nearly capable of suiting what was less a genius than a bundle of very various and vivid and distracted talents ; and it is conceivable that in some sort of fantastic epic of modern life he might have found full scope as a poet. As things fell out, we have in poetry not any single masterpiece which gives us the whole man but a series of successes in which certain parts of him have been expressed as if the others did not exist and a series of

brilliant failures in which, bewildered by the multiplicity of his gifts, he sometimes revenges himself by deliberately bewildering the reader.

Certain of the successes are not only in the anthologies, but fit well into them. No one turning the pages of, say, the 'Oxford Book of English Verse' can ever have been taken aback by 'Love in the Valley,' and there are several short lyrics, such as the beautiful and wistful 'Song in the Songless,' which would go happily in any good company. It would be absurd to say that these are not characteristic; they are quite evidently Meredith's own. But it is not in them that we see the spectacle, familiar to students of him, of Meredith at war with the rest of the poets.

Put, I do not say some freakish failure dear to cryptogramists, but the magnificent 'Nuptials of Attila' or the subtle and agonized 'Modern Love' into a general anthology and they will seem to start out of it. The 'Nuptials of Attila,' with 'Theodolinda,' which appeared originally in the same volume, were written respectively in 1879 and 1872, and are evidence of something very strange and sinister which was thrown up from the depths of his nature in that decade on these two occasions, but never before or again. Baleful, convulsed poems, they are utterances of a headlong impetuosity overcoming the stammer of extreme agitation. In what is common to them, in cruelty especially, the 'Nuptials of Attila' is the more astonishingly endowed, and it has for the ear a quality

all its own in the extraordinary clangour of it. It is a deafening poem, with its over-consonanted lines clashing together and its crashing rhymes; and it exasperates the mind's eye almost as much as the ear with its metallic glitter as of light on the shifting spear-points of Attila's horde.

It is savage beyond anything else in English poetry, and only an idiot piety would pretend that its savagery is merely in duty to the subject. As well say that it was in mere loyalty to the matter and the period that Swinburne charged 'Chastelard' with a suicidal sensuality. No; the 'Nuptials of Attila' is a very great poem, but it is also the furious debauch of an imagination rejoicing in barbarism. It may be very sad from the point of view of those who have gone about interpreting the nature-philosophy of Meredith, but for myself, after hearing a great deal too much of Melampus, the good physician, I find the Sadist refreshing, and I know that if it were only for the superb, ominous refrain or for the sudden and terrifying glimpse of the demented and animalized bride and murderess—

She, the wild contention's cause,
Combed her hair with quiet paws.
Make the bed for Attila!—

this poem would be worth all the things they prize.

There is admirable cruelty of another kind in 'Modern Love,' with a consummate command of style, almost every so-called blemish being the success of an irony which is missed by the detractors. It is a

constricted poem, or series of poems, and it is the constriction which makes it so modern and so terrible. Meredith never cut deeper or with more science or with so much repressed passion : 'The Egoist' is as a complexion treatment to this surgery. And if an age which boasts about having anatomized and psycho-analysed love knew what to ask of specializing anthologists, someone would by now have put it into an anthology of love containing only Donne, Coventry Patmore, some of Mr. Symonds, one poem by Ebenezer Jones, and this of Meredith's.

In his conception of love, when he was not the exhibitor of contorted and mostly second-rate prose epigrams or conducting the esteemed parade of Meredith heroines, he was at war with every one of our poets except those just mentioned and at certain points the Shakespeare of the sonnets and the Keats of one tortured poem. And in the two great things just praised, the 'Nuptials of Attila' and 'Modern Love,' he was legitimately, because to great purpose and result, out of the tradition. But much of his warfare was begun in a pet, or to pamper, turn about, talents he could not organize.

He was wise in going to Nature, on the principle on which the deer according to Pliny (Landor says according to Plutarch, and editors of Landor in consequence of that kind of thing die in early middle age) went to the herb dittany : Nature can extract the darts that Life has shot into one. But it is, on the whole, of little profit to try and bandy epigrams with Box Hill,

and a cultivated brilliance is thrown away on the woods. Not always, but very often, Meredith is too restless to receive what Nature might give him. There are some successes in that part of his poetry, though they are not the things the semi-official commentators on Meredith most value; and there are very remarkable passages and phrases in the poems of a wrestling intellectuality not sufficiently steeped in sensuousness. But read them in alternation with an anthology! It will be no dishonour to Meredith if it be such an anthology as Mr. Walter de la Mare's, for even the poetry which is above the comprehension of children should have that which draws children to it.

AUSTIN DOBSON

EVERYONE who matters has always been right about Austin Dobson—up to a point. But hardly anyone has gone an inch beyond that point, and of all the reviews that will be written on the pleasant memorial erected by his son and his friends probably not one in ten will reveal a suspicion of the inadequacy of the stock eulogies. Nor will any anthology remedy the gross injustice of leaving incomparably his finest poem, 'The Sick Man and the Birds,' unhonoured while his merely accomplished pieces are reprinted with a wearisome persistence.

Dobson was a man of genius who also had talents, and it is only for his talents that he has been praised. They were quite unmistakable, and irresistible, and easy to define : his genius, rarely operative at the outset and the end of his long literary career, was shy, disguised, and extremely hard to praise without implying that Dobson was a bigger and more positive artist than in fact he was. It was largely a genius for evasion. He and his muse were in a conspiracy of silence about the tragic precariousness of life, and the peculiar pathos he often achieved in his smiling verses was due, not to the things said, but to the careful avoidance of speech about a whole side of life. Only a man very acutely aware of the brevity and the irrevocability of the moment could so concentrate on it ; only a man distressed by the monstrous confusion of the world could so resolutely limit himself to a little, neatly ordered world of his imagining.

If he went to the eighteenth century, it was not merely as an antiquary. It was because, with rejection and fanciful rearrangement of the materials his learning gave him, he could make a world in which forgetfulness of the actual world was possible. A man is not so afraid of what is brutal, abrupt and beyond remedy in life till he has shudderingly apprehended the terms on which we live through our 'indefinite reprieve.' Passion reduced to gallantry, in a life governed not by fate but by etiquette, is the ideal of a man only too well aware of the havoc passion makes in the affairs of mankind. The steady refusal to think of more than the

moment's amusement is possible only to a man who knows, with a later poet,

But men at whiles are sober,
And think by fits and starts,
And when they think they fasten
Their hands upon their hearts.

Austin Dobson was a master of the pathos always present in the spectacle of those who are, for the moment, wholly unconscious of the peril of their situation. Artist that he is, he will not hint that the golden afternoon will end in night, and that those figures of the *fête galante* cannot long postpone acquaintance with harsh realities. He will not hint it, but his strict avoidance forces the idea on us. And so, for any imaginative reader, those brocaded personages of his seem to be dancing on a floor that will give way, precipitating the dainty beings into the horror of the pit, and one is moved almost to cry out a warning. How grotesque a cruelty in the scheme of things, that those who have established so many and such exquisite conventions in the game of life should be uncereemoniously hurled into the disorder and grossness of mere living! How outrageous, how like some beast of the gutter assaulting a great lady as she approaches the Court, is the intrusion on such a company of Death!

If I were challenged across a dinner table, and these articles are but table-talk with the licences of the occasion, to illustrate the difference between the pathos of the man in the street and the pathos of the artist, I should contrast Gray's 'Regardless of their doom the

little victims play,' if such were precisely his words, with Dobson's tacit implication of the same idea in verses that trip and sparkle. (Not that I take Gray, the particular instance apart, for an eighteenth-century man in the street: he was a very great and highly independent scholar, and if not a great poet, a great man of letters; and when anybody sums up Gray in the academic way I like to quote for his confusion the delicious

Believe me, dear maids, there's no way of evading;

While ye pish and cry nay, your roses are fading,

which is technically and otherwise matched only by Cartwright's absurdly neglected 'Song of Dalliance' and Thomas Jordan's one perfect lyric.)

Gray was very much more like the eighteenth century, for all his dissent from the ideas of his age, than Austin Dobson. Of course, Dobson knew perfectly well where he was reproducing his favourite period and where he was merely using the material it offered for his private purpose. A criticism which assailed him on the grounds on which we condemn a faked piece of Chippendale would be too silly for retort upon it. But he could, on rare occasions, quit the eighteenth century, abandon evasion, and write personally and directly. I am brought back to what I have already described as beyond comparison his finest poem.

It is not the kind of poem to take anybody by storm. To some readers, on a first experience of it, it may seem to have little beyond charm of cadence. But by the

time the end is reached on a second or third reading any but a callous reader must feel that every line, not so much by its value when taken separately as by the value derived from its perfect adjustment to the pattern of the whole, has done its work.

This is the sick man's song,
Mournful in sooth and fit,
Unrest that cries—How long?
And the night answers it.

The mood has been rendered faultlessly, in a way quite the poet's own.

That piece is buried away in a mass of work which, though never less than dextrous, contains too many album pieces, and which will give casual readers the impression that Dobson was a graceful trifler and no more. We others, in striving to correct that impression ourselves become misleading. I look back over the paragraphs I have written, and find I have called up a less delicate artist than he was. In controverting an error, I have been forced to emphasize just those things about which Dobson was reticent, and have probably conveyed the idea that there was a kind of grimness in his reticence whereas there was no trace of that quality. So hard is it to make amends to this poet without offending against critical truth in another way. But what does it matter? In heaven he and Watteau smile understandingly at each other, frivolous artists each with his secret pathos, and it is not the spirits of the eighteenth century who most nearly comprehend them.

SUBSTANCE AND STYLE

I WISH to draw attention to two quite astonishing literary coincidences discovered in the chances of sick-bed reading, which, when 'shockers' are exhausted, will send a man recreating his feeble mind among writers he else seldom looks at. Long ago in these articles I said that I thought Edward FitzGerald made his style, to a considerable extent, out of the translations of Dryden. Now if anyone is concerned to see what that style can do to its subject-matter, let him read these verses, which precisely anticipate FitzGerald's substance in two lines and reproduce Gray's substance in the rest :

The lizard and the lazy lurking bat
Inhabit, now, perhaps, the painted room
Where the sage matron and her maidens sat,
Sweet-singing at the silver-working loom.

Those lines are by Cunningham, an eighteenth-century poet who has received more attention in the last few years than he had during the whole of the nineteenth century. 'The lizard and the lazy lurking bat' are as near as could be to FitzGerald's 'The lizard and the lion' who keep the courts where Jamshid gloried and drank deep. But elsewhere in the same piece he got equally near to Gray :

The relics of a mitred saint may rest
Where, mouldering in the niche, his statue stands,
Now nameless as the crowd that kissed his vest,
And craved the benediction of his hands.

All of which is curious enough. But to find *two* eighteenth-century poets reproducing Gray and anticipating FitzGerald is an experience indeed. It has been mine, and here is the other, William Whitehead :

Amid these mouldering wastes, this marble round
Where slept the heroes of the Julian name,
Say, shall we linger still in thought profound
And meditate the mournful paths to fame ?

That is passable Gray ; and since, up to a point, Gray is as easy to imitate as Tennyson, it is no great matter. But see what follows.

Here, intolerably phrased, is the matter of FitzGerald's rose growing where some buried Cæsar bled :

In every shrub, in every flowret's bloom
That paints with different hues yon smiling plain,
Some hero's ashes issue from the tomb,
And live a vegetative life again.

Anticipation could hardly be more complete. The effect is utterly different, but there is the substance, and I would give much to know whether FitzGerald had ever read those lines and scornfully thought to what they could be transformed.

Of the partial success of such writers in imitating Gray there is not much to be said. It was not more remarkable than the work Lewis Morris did after Tennyson, and the 'Elegy,' it should always be remembered, though it hardly ever is, belonged to a large body of mortuary literature, and conformed to an existing fashion rather than set one. But that those minor eighteenth-century poets should have come so

very near to FitzGerald's substance while imitating Gray seems as strange a thing as a new Disraeli could desire for a new 'Curiosities of Literature.'

But, to write more seriously, the fact that Cunningham and Whitehead come so near in substance to two such poets as Gray and FitzGerald, while remaining so far from them in effect, is matter for a discourse on the nature of substance in poetry. In a loose, convenient way of speaking, we take the substance of a poem to have an existence independent of its expression in the poem. But truly it has none. We may indeed, in a generalized discussion of probabilities, say that such and such subjects are well suited to poetry, or to particular poets, and that such and such other subjects are not. But once the poem is written its subject exists nowhere but in that poem.

Look again at Whitehead's verses. The epithet 'vegetative' seems absurd, one of the things which prevent the truly poetical expression of the idea which finds purely poetical expression with FitzGerald; but we know what Blake could do with the idea of vegetable life. It is not a question of eighteenth-century or nineteenth-century conventions, of 'poetical diction' as contrasted with the recovered language of poetry. For all the resemblance there may seem to be between them, the substance of Whitehead is not the substance of FitzGerald. What they have in common is an idea not yet incarnated. And it is only when ideas have been incarnated that they matter to the critic of art, poetic or other.

For though what has just been said is truest of poetry, it is true of all literature. That is why they imagine a vain thing who propose to film, say, the 'Tess' of Thomas Hardy. Tess really exists nowhere but in the particular words given her and used about her by Hardy, and in literature she is apprehensible only through those words. Comes the film producer and, robbing us of the privilege of seeing her only through the eyes of her creator, he offers us the poor opportunity of seeing, not her, but a woman in her situation, with our own eyes. How radical a misunderstanding of the nature of art!

But something remains? That is just the danger. Tess abstracted from Hardy's writing is not Tess, but she is still interesting. 'Hamlet,' without Shakespeare's verse, is still an unusual and effective melodrama. So it happens that the narrative, the 'thought' of a poet, in some miserable abstraction, may yet be noteworthy; and there are hosts of critics, lecturers and teachers who positively encourage the notion that in possessing the abstracted matter we are somewhere nearer to the artist than in exposing ourselves to the experience of his work. But on the Day of Judgment very dreadful things will be done to such persons, and in that comforting assurance one may leave them.

The point is that in discovering the coincidences (one of them noted some years ago by Sir Henry Newbolt, I find) I discovered matters for wonder, but not things of the slightest importance to the student of literature. There are anticipations which deserve critical attention.

For example, there is Sir Walter Raleigh's 'The Wood, the Weed, the Wag,' a terrible little poem which significantly anticipates Mr. A. E. Housman. But such are affairs of temper and style, not of substance.

NEWNHAM-DAVIS

'WHERE'S 'Troy, and where's the maypole in the Strand?' Brightness falls from off the air, the Queen's has perished, Young and fare. The Lyons and lounge-lizards keep the courts where Kate Hamilton revelled and drank deep. The majors (and *then* they really were majors, with rooms in Jermyn Street) have joined the majority, not in the sense in which that was said of a woman who married a man named Smith. Only the senescent remember Romano, that artist in cookery and impersonality who always spoke of himself in the third person: 'Poor ole Romano, 'e gotta 'eadache this morning,' consequent on his squaring all complaints about over-charging, not by deduction, but by offering the protestant (and himself) a Fine Champagne. 'The Roman,' they called him.

The Roman, and his trouble,
Are ashes under Uricon.

And Newnham-Davis, who was more than a major, being a colonel, and who was eventually a director of Romano's, feeds on honey-dew and has drunk the milk of Paradise, under protest to the committee.

' I never knew that great gourmet ; but I can boast that I once saw Shelley complain. Yes ; and in Romano's. It was in that incredible period in which Phil May divided mankind into the landed gentry and the Stranded gentry, when the Strand was still ' the motley Strand ' of Charles Lamb's praise, and when a journalist guiding recruits to a redecorated place of refreshment could say, after inspecting it through his critical monocle, ' Parquetry and marquetry, the parents of all the arts.' In those days, Newnham-Davis, in concession to the vulgar necessity of earning a livelihood, wrote for a pink paper, whether well or ill I can hardly say. I deal with him here only as a writer on the science and art of gastronomy.

A soldier, he never forgot the great maxim than an army marches on its stomach, and interpreted the Biblical curse on the serpent as a blessing. All that was well, but it is to be feared that Newnham-Davis cannot be ranked among the very highest of those who have known how to wield both fork and pen. In England the names of them are not much honoured. Walker, who enunciated the great truth about variety, that it should be as from meal to meal and not at the meal, is but a name to most people. Abraham Hayward, so far as he is remembered at all, is remembered in other capacities. There are people so perverse that they think of Thackeray only as a novelist, forgetting the man who said of champagne that it should be a ' winy ' wine. Mr. Saintsbury is oftener applauded for his work on prosody than for his work on port. And so forth.

My point is merely that Newnham-Davis did not quite sufficiently enrich his excellent discourses on the pleasures of the table with those allusions to literature, art, history which are a very real aid to enjoyment. Château Ausone, like Cheval Blanc, is to my mind not quite good enough value for the money, and will not be till the wine-traders give up the pretence that those wines, fine as they are, are the equals of the three classic first growths of Médoc and of the sublime outsider, which comes from Pessac, and confounds the fools who think that Graves is necessarily a white wine, and is named Haut Brion. But it does sharpen appreciation of Château Ausone to hear that the vineyard was, probably, owned by Ausonius.

Newnham-Davis, not through ignorance, was chary of these reminders. *Quia multum amavit*: he loved good living so much that much must be forgiven him. Still, I am forced to complain of a certain lack of the lyrical, of the philosophic also: and it is probably due to his preference for food over wine. He had not much of that ardour which caused the owner of a great vineyard to adopt the motto that, translated out of the Latin, tells us that the wine is 'for the tables of kings and for the altars of the gods,' which caused Colonel Brisson to establish the custom, still honoured by the French army, of presenting arms when passing Clos Vougeot, which caused Nathaniel Hawthorne to say of a certain wine that tasting it was 'almost a moral act' since it involved so delicate a suspension of judgment till the wine yielded up all its reserved savours.

Yet let Newnham-Davis be praised. If he made the error of subordinating wine to food, his judgment in regard to food was very sound. His usually unemotional prose kindled when he wrote of certain dishes, and I seem to remember that this warmth came into it chiefly with reference to soups. He greatly liked Bortsch, always the sign of gastronomic wisdom, and Germiny, which is the soup of angels, though he does not appear to have suspected that the formula for Germiny can be applied to virtually all vegetable soups. He invented or sponsored a new soup, commendable on Imperialistic grounds but too full of other grounds, made from some sort of Nigerian nuts. He understood fish, which is matter for long study, and respected woodcock, and had high intelligence about omelettes.

But he is to be saluted perhaps most because, writing where he did, he brought an air of fine as well as good living into that headachy Bohemia. He gave a certain (if you will, only physical) distinction to a clique that tended to choose recklessly among pleasures. He was an arbiter of elegances where the thing nearest to hand, in cup or glass or on platter, was apt to be preferred, simply because it was so easy of approach. In his way, he was an agency whereby civilization was advanced.

He has had no successors. Those who have since dealt with his subjects have been writers addressing a very much smaller and more discriminating public. Preaching to the converted is well enough: but Newnham-Davis preached to the heathen, and genially,

and with effect. He was of that always rare, and now nearly extinct, race, men of the world, men who knew their London not 'knowingly' but as experts in the art of living.

GEORGE GISSING

By as striking an irony as the history of our literature affords, the chief realistic novelist of the later Victorian period was a man enamoured of the classic past :

Dear and glorious temples ! sanctuaries still for all to whom poetry is religion. These stones, have they not echoed to Hellenic speech ? When Latin worship had fled from them, when the Saracen had done his worst, when the Norman pirate had pillaged all he could to adorn his Christian church at Amalfi, time and solitude became warders of what remained, hallowing the austere beauty of these abandoned fanes to be a monument of the world where gods and men walked together.

That was the kind of prose written with most satisfaction by a novelist who dedicated himself to depicting 'the ignobly decent.' For a while in early years Gissing persuaded himself that, in his excursions into the dreariest regions of the contemporary world, he had the motives of a reformer. But what drove him was almost always a personal grievance. That fact and the quality of the feeling excited in him by his grievance reduce him to a lower rank among novelists than a man of his gifts might have reached.

He was not disinterested enough, and for all his fine and cultivated intellect he was in a sense petty. There is grandeur in Swift's hatred of humanity, whatever the coarse excesses of its expression ; the cruelty of Baudelaire is an inverted compassion, and it is with a divine irony that he evokes his horrors. But Gissing's recoil from the subjects he chooses is often merely like that of a man who has a nervous headache and wishes himself in a situation where eyes, ears and nostrils would be spared annoyance. His quarrel, at least sometimes, is less with the nature of things or with contemporary English civilization than with the lot of Gissing. When one is a scholar, engaged in literary work, and modest in one's demands on the world, one might be allowed the means of getting quietly on with one's work in tolerable surroundings. The novel written in protest becomes then, on its weaker side, a sort of glorified complaint to the landlady, a complaint of noisy and vulgar lodgers, sordid meals, irritating interruptions.

Gissing, I repeat, had a fine mind, and it is hard to believe that anyone knowing his work as a whole can fail to feel both liking and respect for the man. It seems ungenerous, therefore, to press on to the disclosure of his chief weakness, which in any summary statement of it must appear grotesque. But, no doubt unconsciously, Gissing harboured the doctrine that the world is in some sort contracted to support the scholarly man of letters, to spare him the exasperations of common lodgings, shabby clothes, and nasty food,

to enable him to acquire all the books he needs, and to waft him to such countries as may spiritually be homes to him. Gissing's literary heroes show, as he himself showed, a noble determination to follow the difficult ways of art ; they deserve, as he did, our respect, our sympathy. But sooner or later there comes the moment when the reader wishes to shake or slap them. For it is not only in degree but in kind that they differ from men of genius who have arraigned the world justly. Whatever else genius may be, it is an infinite capacity for making other people take pains and bear them. Somehow or other, it secures the conditions of its own full activity. And Gissing's writers are but men of talent. They have the fine qualities which are frustrated by life, not those which achieve victory of a sort even in defeat. Their independence is only that of pensioners doing without the pension the world will not pay them punctually. They can neither extort it nor forget that, according to their belief, it is due.

But if the most typical of his heroes have not the virtue without which all others come near to being futile, they have minds. The most original thing Gissing did in English fiction was not the portraying of poverty or shabby gentility ; it was the calm upsetting of the agreed order of precedence among passions.

'To be famous and to be loved'—that great cry of one of Balzac's personages might be the motto on the title-page of many volumes of the Human Comedy. But in Gissing we hear again and again, never without

effect, the cry of the passion for knowledge, for the finest kind of knowledge. Gissing may have been an imperfect, a biased novelist, often mistaking mere wretchedness for tragedy, but he was the novelist of the purest of all aspirations. His style, always that of a man of letters, and in his final period attaining to a rare dignity, may have been impoverished by his refusal of metaphor, but the sap and the colour come into it when the main passion of his life is expressed. 'The names in Roman history make my blood warm,' one of his characters says; classical names warmed Gissing's prose.

In his eventual liberation he produced what seems to me his finest book, 'By the Ionian Sea,' and 'Henry Ryecroft,' surprisingly mellow for its author, and 'Veranilda.' His son, quoting from every part of Gissing's work, is enabled by his plan to end with the passage from 'Veranilda' in which Basil rides away from the monastery of St. Benedict clasping to his bosom a book. It is right that a volume of excerpts from Gissing should end so, for more than any other of our novelists he put into fiction the devotion to books. Late in life, he thought he should have been an historian, and Gibbon was a lifelong delight to him.

Yet perhaps he should have been an historian not of the political and military events of the classical world but of those agencies whereby its culture was preserved for after ages. The darkness and confusion of the disruption for background; for immediate subject the

industry of some learned monk saving, as well as he could, and with much searching of heart, the literature of paganism !

But perhaps Gissing, who said he had no sense of sin, could not have entered thoroughly into the mind of a St. Jerome hearing the voice from Heaven, 'Ciceronian art thou, not Christian, for where the treasure is there will the heart be also.' Perhaps one's dissatisfaction with the course of his literary life is foolish. He was not of those who find or make an entirely congenial position for themselves. May be that is why he has his personal appeal for us. The appeal is unquestionable. His lowered vitality, his mere irritability with what in life had better be ignored if it cannot be transformed, the absurdity of his expectation of special arrangements for distressed scholars and gentlemen, all are forgiven when Gissing speaks to us of that sacred hunger of his mind. He is the fellow of all who under disabilities live the life of the intellect. He is lodged in their hearts where strictly æsthetic considerations do not apply.

Others may value certain pages of his for the sober power with which the mean setting is presented, for the closeness of observation, for the care with which Gissing wrote prose. But it is not, on the whole, by his purely artistic qualities that Gissing holds those whom he holds.

GORDON HAKE

THE theory that meritorious work invariably, if sometimes only at long length, receives due recognition is very comforting, but it needs qualification. Given time, really good work, however difficult, will find fit readers—provided its author has considered readers. But, as Rossetti pointed out with reference to Hake, there are writers who have not considered readers at all. It is not a question of pandering to contemporary tastes or crazes ; it is not a question of writing, like Charles Lamb, ‘for antiquity,’ or of writing, like Landor, for a posterity composed of a few score of peculiarly cultivated persons. It is a question of having a certain part of the endowment of the true artist in literature.

Among the things which make the ordinary academic history of literature intolerable, at any rate to me, is the obliviousness of the historians to some, at first blush not strictly æsthetic, conditions of literary success. Thus, the typical literary historian does not see that the romantic victory in English poetry would have been won decades earlier than it was if Dyer had not been a quiet creature, Gray reluctant to be thought an author, Collins doomed to madness, Smart mad, Thomson a dweller in his own castle of indolence. A single fighting character among them, and the crisis would have been reached years earlier than it was. Again, he does not see that the animal spirits of Burns count for

almost as much in his success as what, narrowly regarded, is his 'genius.' Nothing could ever have kept Burns from arriving. And then, to come back to my point in this article, the usual historian of literature does not take into account the fact that some writers have been incapable of unconscious or conscious self-identification with the reader.

Gordon Hake was one of these last. 'The practical watchfulness needed for such assimilation,' said Rossetti in reviewing him, 'is as much a gift and instinct as is the creative grasp of alien character. It is a spiritual contact, hardly conscious yet ever renewed, and which must be a part of the very act of production.' Gordon Hake was astonishingly lacking in that gift and instinct. Perhaps the few people who have perceived his rare merits should lament his deficiency, but I am not sure. For given that power of keeping the reader, poor beast, in mind Hake would probably have been no more than a known poet of the third rank ; and, as it is, he is an unknown poet of the second.

For sheer originality, the only minor Victorians fit to be mentioned with him are Ebenezer Jones and Gerard Manley Hopkins. But Hake is even less to be recommended to anyone who has not the faculty of divination. His style, or, rather, his diction, to alter the celebrated catalogue eulogy of a pornographic work, is incurious and disgusting. In the one poem, the one stanza, the one line, he will use language like an inspired child or an angel visitor and like an

eighteenth-century hack poet. He will throw away an idea of extreme novelty in some over-compressed parenthetical line, or work it to death, or make it ridiculous with laboured rhymes. He assaults the reader without preparation, and leaves him without having cleared up matters.

There are passages in Hake in which it seems that the Della Cruscans and William Blake are working together, on a subject suggested by the ghost of a mathematician. Now and then, for a few lines, he attains, without imitating anyone, to a primal energy in simplicity, as of Adam saying, 'Tiger,' in the first use of the name, rather than of Blake's magnificent recapture of primitive wonder with an after all experienced imagination. I cannot cite anything very apposite, for Hake, by a further misfortune, lends himself very ill to brief quotation. But, all the same, read this :

More close around his heart to wind,
She shuts her eyes in childish glee,
'To share,' she said, 'his peace of mind ;
'To sit beneath his shadow-tree.'
So, half in play, the sister tries
To find his soul within her eyes.

It is a girl with her blind brother ; and there is none of the sentimental pathos of the situation we expect, but there is in that stanza, and in another in which he, with a shell to his ear, wonders whether the sea is really alone, the matter of very great poetry.

The matter : seldom more in Hake. He was an amateur in poetry, writing at intervals in the scant

leisure of a successful physician. But the amateurs are the very persons who carefully ape the professionals, and Hake wrote as if he had no predecessors. On the one hand, he will not get full value out of the absolutely novel idea or image or word ; on the other, he will calmly clap down on his page the stalest image, the most worn notion, the most battered word.

Partly, no doubt, because he was a physician, he dealt rather frequently with hypnotism, delirium, disorder of the mind or the nerves, with maladies of which people in general, by God's mercy, know nothing. In all this there was not the least trace of decadent curiosity. He had encountered such things, and in his antiseptic way he treated of them. And by luck I am arrived at the word for him : antiseptic, with all the associations of the word. He had a keen perception of character, but as he writes the character becomes a case. He knows the horrible things of life, but he puts them before us, for all his intermittent vividness, in a strangely abstract way. His pity is profound, impersonal, uncomfoting ; the surgeon's regret (who shall say how far merely scientific ?) that some cases are hopeless. Where Burns or Browning seems to lay on us the hand of a friend, and Whitman, to whom all things must sometimes be forgiven, gives us the grip of the supreme comrade, Hake touches us with hands that would heal us out of a professional quarrel with sickness.

This article is not designed to send anyone to Hake's works. Least of all is it planned with a view to

speeding those who survive it to his autobiography, the humour of which appears only when the remark that Rossetti's family called to see D. G. R. under Hake's roof is read in the light of the fact that the evening before D. G. R., who was suffering from hallucinations, had attempted suicide, a circumstance justifying a slightly unceremonious visit by the family. There is no sense in recommending Hake. The effort he requires is considerable ; the value of its reward is not readily to be appreciated. With so much gold in English poetry, why trouble about ore ? But there was more ore in Hake than in most of the recognized poets of the Victorian era.

FROUDE

No doubt it is dangerous to write of an author in the fervent fit excited by rediscovery, but these articles, as has been explained more than once, are merely table-talk, springing out of the occasion, and not pondered and comprehensive judgments. The chance of a sleepless night has sent me to Froude's History, at which I had not looked for twenty years, and with two volumes devoured I have perhaps enough fresh experience of him, somewhat dim recollections of his other works helping, to hazard an estimate, of the sort that one improvises at table.

Probably no one has worked at any subject treated

by Froude without coming on slip or perversion. Even I, mildly researching some years ago into the matter of Mary Queen of Scots simply because a great poet I was concerned with had written a trilogy on her, found Froude doing a dreadful thing, the citation as evidence against her of a document whose author had expressly said he did not credit the rumour he reported. Inaccuracy is doubtless a grievous sin in an historian ; prejudice, as clearly revealed as Froude's often is, need not be denounced so harshly. Let opponents be at once presented with the admission that Froude, besides being inaccurate, was sometimes narrowly patriotic and Protestant ; and let it be allowed that his honesty of purpose is the only, the inadequate, excuse for his dealings with Carlyle. After all concessions, how entertaining and stimulating a writer remains to us !

Consider, first of all, his style. One used to be told that he was under obligation for it to Newman, and indeed he owed something to his first master, though nothing, as regards manner, to his second, Carlyle. But, it seems to me now, the peculiar attraction of Froude's style at its best arises from the too seldom perceived fact that it is an unobtrusively but perceptibly novel variant of an accepted and in itself attractive standard style. The basis of it is that style which the eighteenth century handed on to the less eccentric writers of the nineteenth, a clear, measured, well-mannered, untricky style, in which some of the best qualities of the man of the world are combined with a certain academic nicety. Now a history written in that

style might be expected to read rather like Hume's ; but Froude, keeping very close to the standard, insinuates into that style, from time to time, a more delicate colour and a less obvious music than can be found in any of its previous masters. It is rather as if Southey had quietly become just a little æsthetic. The charm is in the surprise of finding that colour and music in what is substantially a style without promise of them.

Everyone knows the famous prelude :

For, indeed, a change was coming upon the world, the meaning and direction of which even still is hidden from us, a change from era to era. The paths trodden by the footsteps of ages were broken up ; old things were passing away, and the faith and the life of ten centuries were dissolving like a dream. Chivalry was dying ; the abbey and the castle were soon together to crumble into ruins ; and all the forms, desires, beliefs, convictions of the old world were passing away, never to return. A new continent had risen up beyond the western sea. The floor of heaven, inlaid with stars, had sunk back into an infinite abyss of immeasurable space ; and the firm earth itself, unfixed from its foundations, was seen to be but a small atom in the awful vastness of the universe. In the fabric of habit in which they had so laboriously built for themselves, mankind were to remain no longer.

It is beautiful prose ; and yet !——

A passage of similar intention in Walter Pater, and here Froude is not far in mood or in merit from Pater, would have been thoroughly justified by its sequel : Froude gives us no true sequel. ' And now it is all

gone,' he continues musically enough in his next paragraph, but the passage remains somehow unattached. Just there is one of the commonest faults of Froude as a writer of fine, imaginative prose. Some day we shall have inflicted on us, by an American or a German professor, a vast monograph on transition ; I can only hope that it will take account of the very best example in English poetry, the miraculous imaginative tact with which Shelley, in 'Epipsychidion,' a poem originally conceived on a somewhat mundane level, passes and repasses between heaven and earth, and of the very worst examples in English prose, which are Froude's.

But if Froude's sometimes exquisite preludes are followed by nothing quite worthy of them, he abounds in passages of most admirable descriptive and expository prose. Even in that matter of Mary Queen of Scots, who can refrain from applauding the pages which tell of the murders of Rizzio, of Darnley, or of the final scene ? Who can read without emotion his praise, almost worthy of its subject, of the Anglican liturgy ? And then, outside the History, he exhibits an extraordinary talent for the fable. Of the kind, there is nothing better in our literature, for salt and for propriety of demure and damaging style, than 'The Cat's Pilgrimage,' in which a cat, earnestly seeking for a right way of life, hears from every beast the commandment of duty, but receives such contradictory or incomplete interpretations of duty as to be utterly confounded ; nothing better, unless it be 'The Bread-

Fruit Tree,' that is, the tree of Faith, inexhaustible, as it was supposed, but at long last found unproductive. Froude was an undeveloped fabulist, a still more undeveloped novelist, and it may be that as historian he would have done better without promptings from his not fully exercised talents for other work. But at least he was a vivid artist in the writing of history.

In the end, what criticisms, however well founded, of Froude as historian mean is only that he was a fallible chronicler and a somewhat prejudiced judge. I cannot see, in my slight acquaintance with history, that they seriously affect him as an artist, a master of description, of portraiture, of narrative. His point of view is not difficult to discover. Having made up his mind that we must not trouble too much about the ugliness or savagery of the means to great ends, he becomes in some sort the apologist of violent or unscrupulous personages. Morally, all that may be very objectionable, but in art it is little worse than the novelist's acceptance of whatever conduces to his climax. And I find myself wishing that he had frankly abandoned all pretence of judging, and given us Henry VIII. from Henry's own point of view. He had understanding of that great creature, and understanding is very much rarer than moral judgment.

SAMUEL BUTLER

WHY on earth cannot people take a writer for what he is, and be happy with him, instead of either complaining that he is not somebody else or insulting him by pious exaggeration? I have not got beyond what Oscar Wilde used to call the usual age, but I am old enough to remember the time when hardly anyone bothered about Samuel Butler. On that followed a period in which his achievement as a writer was magnified absurdly, by those intolerable persons who cannot admire a man at all until they have claimed immortality for every paragraph he produced. Now, though the figures of his sales may contradict me, he seems rather out of favour. What is his true position?

As one who admired some things of Butler's before they were generally admired, and was never a Butlerite, I think I can judge fairly soberly; and it seems to me that Butler will live nominally by 'Erewhon,' but actually only by his 'Note-books,' by the official biography of him, and by 'The Way of All Flesh.' As to the last, nearly all that is best in it is part of his biography; it declines sensibly as soon as the experiences of its hero become quite other than its author's. The biography is very good, but Butler was not Johnson and Mr. Festing Jones was not Boswell, and on the whole, once read, it passes out of the mind. And the 'Note-books' are what they profess to be.

In the fullest sense of the word, Butler was not a

writer. He was a character, a questioner, a disturber of settled convictions. A really solid body of achieved literature, I protest, would have overburdened Butler, prevented us from thinking of the man. 'Paints, too,' said Whistler, when they were reciting the many talents of Leighton : how horrid it would have been if 'Was a character' could have been merely tacked on to a catalogue of his books ! It is not the business of a character to be a man with a great deal of intrinsically very valuable accomplished work. Outside literature, we know, characters are men travelling lightly, the gipsies, the vagabonds, the broken gentlemen, the tavern philosophers, whose company we relish for their art of being authoritative without the credentials dull people require before they will let a man open his mouth on any great matter. It is not very different in literature. Show us a man with a great deal of valuable baggage and we degenerate into customs officials. But Butler amuses us like a traveller who has little to declare except a bonnet full of bees : we examine him rather than his possessions.

I do not remember whether it is in the biography or in the 'Note-books,' but somewhere Butler boasted, more than anything else, of having upset the Darwinians and of having proved that the 'Odyssey' was written by a woman. He also produced an interpretation of Shakespeare's sonnets, which no one, so far as I know, has taken very seriously ; and threw off a large number of quite original opinions on literature, music, morality, and what not. The literary opinions are

seldom more than amusing at first encounter. For example, when he said that Blake was no good because he studied Italian late in life in order to understand Dante, and Dante was no good because he leaned on Virgil, and Virgil was no good because he was adored by Tennyson, he was merely finding a flippant form for the expression of prejudice. As regards music, of which I am not competent to judge, he seems to have got little beyond varied assertion of the supremacy of Handel, but much may be forgiven an obsession which results in this kind of libretto :

How blest the prudent man, the maiden pure,
Whose income is both ample and secure,
Arising from consolidated Three
Per Cent. Annuities paid quarterly !

It is said that the music he and Mr. Festing Jones composed for this was perfectly Handelian, but for me the point is that it is the pleasantest thing of its sort since Peacock's financial chorus. It is the opinions on conduct that count.

Butler's experience had taught him to mistrust everything. He had the bitterest reason to mistrust conventional ideas about family life, having been badgered by his pious and monstrous father till he became convinced that the institution of the family was produced by the lust for tyrannical power rather than by natural human affection. A normal experience of the love between man and woman might have cured him of many of his suspicions, but he saw women only as menaces to his liberty. Even the perfect friendship

given him by Miss Savage could not allay his terror. She, after all, did want to marry him, and she, in the bitter pathos of his own verses about her, was :

Plain and lame and fat and short,
Forty, and overkind.

Not even with her could he be the perfect friend. I do not think it was that old terror known to men normal enough but imaginative :

Toujours ce compagnon dont le cœur n'est pas sur !

It was inability to believe in all that dignifies passion. Only with mockery of himself did he go to those others, his mistresses. And of the three men whom he trusted, one betrayed him in a manner for which there has never been any explanation.

Whether by the method of Plutarch or by the method of Browning, there should be brought together Charles Augustus Howell and Charles Paine Pauli. Howell, a very excellent liar, a good forger of pictures, an enlightened collector, with all the charm of the best Stuarts, and all the fascination of those who bear the bar sinister, 'did' and helped some of the greatest painters and poets of his day. They treated him, in the end, quite absurdly, allowing him to die not with a cut throat and a half-sovereign between his teeth in the gutter outside a Chelsea public-house, which at least would have been romantic, but in a hospital of the pneumonia which decorously supervened on a draught in the windpipe. They should have run him as a Jacobite Pretender to the throne of England. But he

deluded the mainly unsuspicious. Pauli, over a long period, duped the utterly disillusioned Butler, and was apparently a person of no special attraction. He was not even at the pains to pretend that Butler did not bore him.

The discovery that Pauli had 'done' him through all those years came too late to have any important effect on the dupe, and I think it is to the experiences of boyhood that one must cast back for Butler's mistrust of human beings : to that and to the reception of his best books. If I remember rightly, with one exception, no book of his sold more than about 300 copies, and some sold much fewer. To the scientists he assailed he was merely a porcupine encountered on the road, bristling but without comprehension. For the general public he simply did not exist. To us he is, or should be, a man of a peculiar cast whose opinions are worth considering, not so much because they are sometimes very usefully at odds with those of most people, but because they proceed from a character, are very definitely his.

THE SOCIETY 'PAR'

WITH so little ground left unworked by American and Teutonic researchers, a man may well boast of any small literary discovery, but that which I have just made is a very great one. Lest, in Wilde's witty phrase about

the mystery novels of James Payn, the suspense of the writer should become intolerable, I hasten to confide it to this fit audience. Briefly, it is the origin of that esteemed and now generally used literary form—the social note or ‘par,’ the snippet from the diary of the man about town or the lady of fashion, the instrument of, among others less famous, Lord Castlerosse.

The thing, now vended with racing tips and other such matters of democratic concern, was born in the purple, in the purplest of patches. Not to delay disclosure any longer, the beginning is in De Quincey. Listen :

But this younger sister moves with incalculable motions, bounding, and with a tiger’s leaps. She carries no key ; for, though coming rarely amongst men, she storms all doors at which she is permitted to enter at all. And *her* name is——.

Her name is any that you care to pick out of scores well known to the readers of the brighter papers. There would be nothing to disconcert one in such a paragraph in to-day’s paper, for the jazzing and gate-crashing of younger sisters are familiar to us. But in De Quincey’s day, when the waltz shocked by its licentiousness so moderate a moralist as Byron, steps were strictly ordered, and leaps in any degree resembling a tiger’s would not have had the approval of the best social authorities. De Quincey was prophetic ; wrote in anticipation of our social life rather than in description of that in which, night-moth though he was, he took but a nominal part.

At what date English society, in respect of its young women, became fast is not easily to be determined. But for Saturday Reviewers it is a part of piety to believe that it was in the time of Mrs. Lynn Linton, whose famous article on 'The Girl of the Period' created a sensation without parallel. Yet Mrs. Lynn Linton, though in the broader sense the greatest social journalist of her age, was no writer of society 'pars.' She surveyed tendencies, and did not deal in personalities. She pilloried types, and unlike De Quincey would never have ended a passage with : 'And her name is ——.' Or, if she had fallen into that error, she would have 'sinned strongly,' and would not have been guilty of the timid pomposity of writing, 'And her name is *Mater Tenebrarum*,' when she meant Mrs. Dark.

Mrs. Lynn Linton is not in the pedigree at all. She had attached herself, in a *quasi* filial relation, to so aloof a master as Landor ; and though it cannot be said she learned her style from him, she was a comparatively plain writer. The plush of prose derives, not from her well-wearing serge, but from the velvet of De Quincey. In the notices given by critical papers during the century to volumes of social reminiscence and gossip we may have glimpses of the development of the form, but for a really clear view of it it is, of course, necessary to go outside of literature and to the magazine or home or chit-chat pages of the papers.

The subject thus falls for the most part outside my scope. Yet not quite so much outside it as might be supposed. For the social parade has been introduced

into fiction from the papers. Do not ask me when that happened. Let it suffice that a landmark was 'Dodo,' which, if my memory serves me, was published in 1894. Recall the description of Mrs. Vane :

Mrs. Vane's smile always suggested a reformed vampire, who had permanently renounced her blood-thirsty habits, but had not quite got out of the way of gloating on what would have been her victims in the unregenerate days.

Evidently, a change has been wrought in the temper of the artist. De Quincey notes the bounding and the self-invitation of Mrs. Dark in the pure artistic spirit. Social experience, he would admit if you were trivial enough so to question him, social experience of the corybantic and intrusive lady would be trying. But, then, so would William Blake, who walked as firmly in this world as in the next, have acknowledged that the tiger, whether burning in the forests of the night or otherwise diverting itself, is not the most satisfactory of companions. Putting such petty considerations apart, those two great writers observed, the one his beauty, the other his beast, as illustrations of splendid energy. On the other hand, Mr. E. F. Benson regards Mrs. Vane with a certain prejudice, an obvious thankfulness that the vampire in her has been subdued.

It is of this prejudice, this really irrelevant malice, that I wish to complain when I scrutinize the society 'pars' in the papers of to-day. It is not as if there has been no great examples to the contrary since De Quincey.

She is older than the rocks among which she sits ; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the

secrets of the grave ; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her, and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants : and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as Saint Anne, the mother of Mary . . .

Possibly, Lord Castlerosse would go the length of saying of some society leader on the Riviera that she was older than the rocks among which she sits (portrait inset). But he would say it to the discredit of the lady. Not so Pater. As a man, he had a strong aversion from the decrepit, but as an artist he suspended it, and it is with an exquisite tact that he refers to her past.

I appeal to Lord Castlerosse. Can he not, now that I have shown him how De Quincey dealt with Mayfair and Pater with the fashionable Italian resorts, can he not resolve to deal with his acquaintances in the spirit of art ? It is merely a question of transferring people from one category to another. Mrs. Dark's leaps and forcible entries ceased to be objectionable to De Quincey the moment he concentrated on her energy ; Pater found no difficulty when he had once translated the lady into a picture ; and there is hardly a personage in the social news who could not be beautifully eulogized when imaginatively transmuted into the zoological order. If Christopher Smart could find a certain beauty in a cosmopolitan financier—

Through the turbulent profound
Shoots Xiphias to his aim,—

or words to that effect—why cannot our social 'par' writers ?

SIR HENRY NEWBOLT

SIR HENRY NEWBOLT has fared with the public much as Austin Dobson fared : he has enjoyed great popularity, and been undervalued. Years ago the late Mr. Elkin Mathews, a publisher-bookseller who genuinely cared for poetry, flourished in my face a copy of the twenty-somethingth edition of, I suppose, ' Admirals All,' but it may have been ' The Island Race,' and said, ' So poetry can sell.' It can, but the writer of poetry which sells may easily suffer through the popularity of his best-selling work. To anthologists, and presumably therefore to people in general, Sir Henry Newbolt is the writer of his earlier verse. Now, judged by that alone, he is clearly entitled to a definite and permanent place among English poets. ' Drake's Drum ' is a thing unsurpassed in its kind, and there are half a dozen other more or less early pieces, among them ' Gillespie's Ride,' one of the very best of modern ballads, admirable for the spirit with which the poet has done things seldom accomplished.

To think of patriotic poetry and the poetry which celebrates deeds of heroism is to feel shivers running up the spine. Campbell, to be sure, produced one almost perfect thing, in a form, due to a lucky after-thought, which is both original and exactly appropriate. There is Wolfe's one poem, which Byron excusably took for a rough draft by Campbell ; it has dignity in its emotion, and one excellently precise phrase, but

strikes one as somehow amateurish. What else is there? That is, until one comes to Mr. Newbolt's own generation with Mr. Rudyard Kipling. A few pieces suggest themselves: 'Tennyson's almost great success with 'The Revenge' and his less happy hurrah-for-England exercise about Lucknow; the effective enough, though quite uninspired, piece by Doyle about the soldier of the Buffs; and so on. I say nothing of Swinburne, the most magnificent of whose patriotic poetry dealt with no particular episode. But there is no need to make a catalogue. It will be conceded that as the poet of certain of his earlier pieces Sir Henry Newbolt had few rivals and hardly a superior. But it is as the author of his later work that he should most be valued, and to it I wish now to invite attention.

To me it seems that Sir Henry Newbolt set out with no better philosophy of life and no subtler 'nerves of delight' than belong to the perfect public-school product; and, to make sorrowful confession, I am not of those many who think that the equipment of a sixth-form boy can or ought to take one beyond the sixth form. It is madness to say such things in a country which honours statesmen and men of business and artists almost entirely in proportion to their failure to get beyond the sixth-form frame of mind, but to me it seems imbecile that the principles of good form and of playing the game, excellent as they are, should be regarded as sufficient for mature life, and that a genial rule-of-thumb method should be held adequate for the treatment of the most delicate issues that present

themselves to adult men and women. Sir Henry would doubtless recoil from such blasphemy, but he himself, by about 1908, suddenly outgrew his school outfit. It is a mature mind, aware of the complexities of human conduct, of the strange ways thought may travel, that expresses itself in the beautiful 'Songs of Memory and Hope.'

Listen to this :

Alas ! alas ! what impious hands are these ?
They have cut down my dark, mysterious trees,
Defied the brooding spell
That sealed my sacred well,
Broken my father's fixed and ancient bars,
And on the mouldering shade
Wherein my dead were laid
Let in the cold clear aspect of the stars.

We are some way from the class-room and the fives-court and all the rest of the apparatus for turning out young men who shall be very much alike and who will always know when to switch off the intellect and do the conventionally correct thing. A great change has come over the poet. He speaks with a new gravity, with an intimacy even more new, and in a choicer language. The narrative poet seemed to take all things at their face value ; this lyrical poet brings with him, in the true artist's way, his own values. Here is no grown-up schoolboy ; here is an austere, deeply moved, exquisite artist, comparable in certain spiritual qualities with Mr. Robert Bridges himself. The proper deference to sacred things has deepened and warmed into a profound and ardent piety ; the patriotic pride

has become something not unlike that which animates, for instance, 'The Fair Brass' of Mr. Bridges.

There is piece after piece in that volume which ought to be quoted for the confusion of those who think Sir Henry Newbolt virtually completed his work in the earlier books. It contains a masque, with one lovely song in it; it contains a poem of fraternal love which, without imitation, has a conclusion worthy of Wordsworth, above all others the poet of memory; it has I cannot reckon how many passages and phrases which reveal a sense of the tears of things without becoming tearful. That all those pieces should be popularly neglected, and some few vigorous enough poems of earlier years be taken as this writer's best!

But he is other things besides being a poet. He has written better criticism of poetry than many who are reputed critics. He has produced good anthologies, and suggested a method by which the facts of literary history would be noted not in strict chronological order, but as they vividly affected the literary world, so that, for instance, William Blake would be noticed not with his contemporaries but at the stage at which Gilchrist, the Rossettis and Swinburne made him an influence. He has written good romances. And there was a time when he edited the *Monthly Review*, making it in every respect an admirable thing. But it is to his poetry that I return.

Despite appearances in his early volumes, he is not of the public-school, Empire, blue-water, inspired Philistine class of poet. His true affinities are with Mr.

Bridges, Mr. Binyon, and the late Mary Coleridge. He is far more intimate than readers of his early work think ; and so far from being emotionally most free in his looser work, he is of those poets whose restraint of style increases with the intensity of their feeling—most passionate when most Parnassian.

CRITICAL ERRORS

ABOUT thirty years ago a distinguished critic, raising his voice against the reckless use of superlatives by the reviewers of professedly responsible papers, cited some dreadful instances. One reviewer had said that Mr. Hall Caine was the rival of Stendhal, another that his work was ‘ distinctly ahead of all the fictional literature of our time and fit to rank with the most powerful fictional writing of the past century.’ That is to say, in the opinion of those two reviewers, who were not without support from others, Mr. Hall Caine in 1900 was pretty well the equal of Balzac, Stendhal, Tolstoy. But that was nothing to what was offered the public in definition of the genius of Stephen Phillips, who was described by Mr. William Archer as ‘ Dumas speaking with the voice of Milton,’ and compared by various other reputable reviewers, on terms of something like equality, with Sophocles, Lucretius, Leopardi and Landor.

A certain number of people saw then, all can see now, the absurdity of such eulogies. But are we any

nearer the attainment of a critical standard which shall preclude follies of that sort? I think not; and I do not see why we should expect progress. The evil against which protest was made was not new in 1900, and it will be with us in 2000. Dr. Johnson was pleased to remark of Blackmore's 'Creation' that 'It wants neither harmony of numbers, accuracy of thought, nor elegance of diction,' and he thought Hannah More 'the most powerful versificatrix in the language.' Coleridge, the master critic, thought some colonial bosh by Pringle, a sort of Service without the advantage of a Kipling as predecessor, a very fine poem. Some of the finest judges have had these aberrations. As for the rank and file of reviewers in all periods——!

Undoubtedly reviewing is an impossible business because it requires incompatible qualifications. A Walter Pater may write a few consummate reviews, but he cannot be a reviewer in the full sense because the business precludes fastidious choice and long periods of abstention. No pure critic can be a satisfactory working reviewer because he will be inadequately acquainted with the mass of current literature, and will subject ephemeral books, often meritorious in their way, to tests that are unreasonable. On the other hand, the persistent working reviewer is in great danger of becoming too lenient for the same reason that the dustman overvalues his rare finds. To keep steadily in mind both the eternal standard of excellence and the standard of the day is well nigh beyond human capacity.

We must not ask that; but we may ask that over-

praise of what the reviewer takes for new masterpieces should not involve degradation of the old. It is a perfectly reasonable request, for nothing more than honesty. The gentleman who dragged in all the greatest novelists of the nineteenth century to compare with Mr. Hall Caine, those other gentlemen who suggested close resemblances between Stephen Phillips and some of the greatest poets and dramatists, had never in truth made the comparisons. That the popular novelist and the popular dramatist were eulogized in terms properly reserved for the supreme artists was a sin that may be forgiven. The inexpiable thing was the dishonesty, unconscious no doubt, of affecting to make comparison when the writers involved had never been set side by side for measurement in the reviewers' mind.

Now in that matter I can see no progress. What is called the diffusion of knowledge has made known to the multitude by name and by excerpts writers of the past who are not known to it in their essential greatness. Possibly there is some gain in this, though for myself I cannot see how a man is the better for knowing anything which he has not assimilated. Let that, however, be. The point is that the allusion, the comparison, can now be effective as a century ago it could not. Appears the reviewer who will not call a terse writer terse, but calls him Tacitean; who will not be at the pains to define a quality in a small new writer, but uses the misleading shorthand of such epithets as Shakespearean, Sophoclean, Balzacian, what not.

This part of the evil, I think, is new, dating from

no more than forty years ago. To be sure, the general practice of reviewers cannot be judged from that of a group so distinctive that they gave to the language a new term, Saturday Reviewers ; but at least in the early files of that paper I have observed a marked reluctance to drag in the illustrious names of the past, except in occasional bludgeoning of contemporary presumption. But there comes in the other danger, of using the past merely as a bludgeon.

The appeal now, in fettering new development, is not likely to be the old appeal to what has been acknowledged *semper, ubique, ab omnibus*, to be great literature. It is not the classics that will be invoked so much as the major idols of the day. Indeed, in some quarters the cry will be to the writers of to-morrow. A literary woman, still, alas, living, once rebuked me for praise of an author whose work was achieved before the war, and conformed, with subtle interior differences, to tradition instead of being an announcement of the dawn of intellectual Bolshevism.

But the appeal to the future, in this form, is even more foolish than the appeal to the past. The past we at least know, and it is enormously richer than any future concerning the next ten generations can be. Let us, then, desist from judging books by their conformity to the past or their apparent prophecy of the future : let us consider literature in the spirit of the eminent French novelist who said there was no question of ages and schools and tendencies, but only a question of whether a writer had or had not talent.

It may save time and trouble to affix personal epithets, but the able writer who presented M. Maeterlinck as 'the Belgian Shakespeare' was perhaps even more foolish than the person who described the late Ella Wheeler Wilcox as 'the Sappho of Connecticut,' for he made ridiculous a genuine artist while the other only unintentionally added to the laughter of the critical over a poetaster. But both injured the honour of great writers. The hastiest reviewer can at least refrain from doing that.

SIXTY YEARS OF THE NOVEL

To look through reviews of fiction written fifty or sixty years ago, reviews of seriously ambitious fiction in a seriously critical periodical, is to see that the novel has been promoted to an eminence of which few of its practitioners or critics then dreamed. There is an odd, rather attractive, simplicity about the old criticisms, whose writers had little suspicion of the kind of technical problem to which Mr. Percy Lubbock or Mrs. Woolf have more or less recently devoted themselves. Coming, say, thirty years nearer our own day, we may see several novelists, Meredith, Hardy, Henry James especially, throwing out invitations to another sort of criticism, but for years they remain without much response. They, and the seriously artistic novelists generally, are ahead of criticism. Matthew

Arnold, saying some fine things about Tolstoy, can also write such nonsense as his declaration that the novel which is perhaps Tolstoy's masterpiece is not art but life, and gains as a representation of life by what it loses in art. Walter Pater deals with a novelist at length only once, and then with a secondary French novelist. Swinburne shows acumen enough, but deals only with Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins, and, late in life, in eulogy rather than criticism, with Dickens. (There is a profound terse judgment of his on Balzac, but only in passing.) The ordinary critics are little enough concerned with the subtler problems of the novel, and there is often a trace of 'only a novel' in their treatment of fiction.

But now it sometimes looks as if the novel would become an illustration of technical theories and little else. That is to say, the novel of the intellectuals. The devil has whispered in the ears of the novelist that he must no longer wobble about between the various positions which his careless great Victorian predecessors occupied as convenience prompted, but in each novel must decide once for all whether he is writing as omniscient, as the God's spy of 'King Lear,' or limiting himself to what one character would know, or—but the methods of approach are many. To me, who am incapable of writing a novel, the situation of the conscientious novelist seems rather like that of Queen Guinevere in the poem by William Morris, compelled to choose without knowing the consequences. The great casual mid-Victorians made no final choice at

the outset : they knew as much or as little, obtruded themselves as often or as little, as seemed convenient from one instalment of their novels to the next. In the strict sense, they were not artists. And yet——

Well, the question arises, in such musings as these articles are made out of, whether the novel can altogether bear the burden of artistic responsibility laid upon it. To begin with, it is not one of the primary literary forms. It is a parvenu or a lucky bastard. Then, it is very doubtful whether it can thoroughly satisfy purely æsthetic demands. It is impossible to point to any very great drama or poem that was not the work of a very great artist ; but at the head of all novelists we have Balzac, that unscrupulous, clumsy, over-productive creature, who in a sense bungled every novel he wrote, who never produced a page of perfect prose. Do not all other novelists look somewhat thin beside him ? With some few reservations, we can very reasonably compare Stevenson with Scott and Dumas, and the taut, trim, careful work of the later man looks attenuated beside that of his careless predecessors. But Stevenson's is a simple case. It is with Henry James that we have fiction at its utmost artistic stretch, and however much we may admire him we cannot but feel that much of the epical and all of the gross energy of life have been excluded from his choice, exquisitely ingenious, after all not absolutely great work.

But Henry James himself is out of date. We have arrived at the novel which gives us not thought but cerebration, not primary passion but faint, self-critical

letch for passion, not large and conclusive action but the twitching of the nerves. Also, we have arrived at the novel which is a hold-all for the whole of a writer's mental baggage ; and at about fifty other types of novel which no mid-Victorian could have written. The amount of cleverness put into the better fiction of to-day is astonishing. But who is satisfied ? And mid-Victorian fiction, at its best, did satisfy its contemporaries, and still satisfies many people.

It may be that fiction does wisely not to challenge a strictly æsthetic judgment. It may be that the cut-and-come again amplitude of the older novelists was less dangerous than the planning of their successors. It is conceivable that the picaresque novel, using that term in its most liberal sense, may prove to be the most nearly satisfying sort of fiction. But, naturally and rightly, the moderns are not to be deterred by such considerations. They are excitingly engaged in exploring the possibilities of the novel, and why should they stop before those are exhausted ?

Why, indeed. Only, their readers may stop, stubbornly declaring that they will not be dragged further along the road to a perfection that seems to them unattainable and anyhow not worth the attaining. They may admit, those readers, that the older fiction occasionally irritates them, by its excessive reticence about much that is significant in the relation of the sexes, by lapses into puerility, by moralizing, by gratuitous disturbance of the illusion. Still, they may contend, there is a kind of content to be had out of it

that the ablest contemporary fiction seldom gives. There is there, in the principal mid-Victorians, something of the breadth and casualness of actual life, whereas a great deal of the best fiction of our own day seems to be cramped and tortured by its own cleverness.

I am not saying that such complaints are altogether reasonable, only that they are made, out of hearing of the intellectuals, and by people who are not illiterate fools. They are not peculiar to this decade. To dip into the files is to learn that the progress of English fiction has been accompanied by plaintive outcries from readers who felt it was going too fast and in the wrong direction. The reference is not to those occasions when alarmed morality has shrieked against a particular work by, say, Hardy or Mr. George Moore : that was later, and is not truly relevant to the present subjection. What I have in mind is the almost continuous lament of the average intelligent reader of novels that the novelists were going beyond his range of sympathy, if not also beyond the limits of his comprehension. Will that wailing continue ? For a while no doubt it will, but it seems quite probable that one day we shall see some fine novelists swinging back to the very simplest tale-telling.

MR. KIPLING

EVERYONE is agreed in remembering as a pertinent fact that Mr. Rudyard Kipling began with journalism. But all the things that can be said about him in an article with that text have been said long ago ; I do not propose repeating them. For myself, I wish he had begun, not in the editorial department but among the compositors.

There, indeed, would have been a text for a critic ! For all of Mr. Kipling's earlier work in prose and much of his later has the effect of having been composed a stick at a time, and precisely fitted into its destined space. He has had from the beginning this way of working in, as it were, little, sharply defined blocks of type, which come together exactly, with a metallic click. He has understood form best when spelled as the printer spells it. To say that little or nothing could be removed from a page of his prose without injury is only to say that he is, as all other good writers, hostile to surplusage. Where he differs from them is that the removal would leave a precisely defined gap. The work has not been woven together ; it has been fitted together. Of the ingenuity and exactitude of the fitting there is no reason to say much ; the resource and science of this man, even when condescending to tricks, have been evident to every reader for close on forty years. What is worth noticing is a consequence of his method, a sort of side-by-side presentation of things

in a world in which nothing seems to be retiring to its source or trembling through into the region of tangible things.

To return to that fancy of this work as composition in the technical sense, the type is excellent and the impression as sharp as could be desired, but you will be wasting time if you look for more than single printing can give. You can read on endlessly, for a less dull writer there never was ; and you are invited by his terseness to read between the lines ; but you cannot read through the words into something submergent or emergent. It is not a question of superficiality in the bad sense. Notoriously, this writer has extraordinary powers of observation and a tireless curiosity and a vivid imagination. But though he may choose to work far below the mere surface of life, he will proceed by juxtaposition ; he will give us, brilliantly, the succession of things, and never the layer-upon-layer. He will present us with the truth, but with a confidently carved horizontal slice of it, not with the hesitant plumbing of its depths. Truth is solid for him, whereas it is aqueous or vaporous with still greater writers.

Mr. Kipling has not only, in some of his Indian stories, written about caste incidentally ; he has made virtually all the characters of his Indian and other stories talk the language of caste. The thing was a novelty when, about 1891, Mr. Kipling awoke famous, and by a very natural error it was taken to be proof of an almost unparalleled, in its own kind unequalled,

power of characterization by speech. But the novelist of dialect and trade jargon is always to be approached with some suspicion. He may be giving us the voice of the individual as well as that of the race, or class, or trade, but it is far more likely that he is escaping from the duty of inventing a minutely individualized utterance under cover of provincialisms or trade terms. With Mr. Kipling, when one considers his work closely, there is a very great deal of characterization as regards the race, or class, or trade of the speaker, and it is often marvellously good. He really does know, or persuades us that he knows, what the topmen, whoever they may be, say when they clear the raffles, whatever they may be, with their clasp-knives in their teeth—the gagged blasphemies are admirably reported or invented. But of such things, considered as the speech of the individual, one becomes now and then sceptical.

No doubt the kinds of men Mr. Kipling prefers to write about are not much engaged in finding a precise mode of self-expression. Fifty per cent. of their locutions, let it be assumed, would in real life be out of the common national stock, thirty per cent. out of the stock of their class, the rest out of the stock of their trade. But that argument will not avail. It is the business of the artist in literature, while indicating race and class and trade, to give us the voice of the man himself. It is well we should hear the half-humorous, half-serious groan of all white men under the burden of responsibility for the sullen, savage peoples, half devil and half child, but we want the groan with a quite

personal accent. It is fine to be acquainted with the common language of Scotch first engineers when the engines—well, do not function; but we want the differentiated voice of McAndrew. I suspect the note, even as the average of seafaring men's language, is a little forced. Why, in the Royal Navy itself there was not so long ago a terrible affair because an eminent officer called Mr. Barnacle, the bandmaster, something beginning with a B. My own theory is that he simply called him 'Barnacle.' And if that can cause a crisis, what would not be the consequences of Kiplingesque argot?

By now it has begun to be clear what genius working under such limitations would produce in fiction. Not entirely succesful novels, we may be sure. High success in the novel requires a power of coaxing secret after secret out of a character, meaning after meaning out of a situation. Mr. Kipling's characters are given us once for all, by himself in terse and brilliant description, in obviously appropriate action, and by themselves in speech hardly at all except in so far as they are administrators, soldiers, Europeans confronted with the East, Orientals confronted with the West, in short, members of their race, class, profession or trade. It is in the brief story that his limitations most nearly cease to matter while his great powers tell most. And it is not by accident, or because Mr. Kipling is more interested in animals than in human beings, for he is not, that the 'Jungle Books' are so successful. What should a wolf do with individuality? How should a

wolf not be *de race*? Truth to type, ethnical or professional, and efficiency are the conditions to be satisfied before Mr. Kipling can rejoice in a character. The highly individualized creature who belongs to no herd, tribe, school, regiment, and the fumbler, fumble he as nobly as Hamlet, are of no use to him.

About the poet the capital fact, I suppose, is that he frankly (and with immense skill) uses the apparatus of every school of poets. I have been told that when he was on the *Civil and Military Gazette* at Lahore, from the office of which he could hear the band playing in the public gardens of an afternoon, he wrote his verses to, or on suggestions from, the tunes it chanced to play. He has done something very like that in later years with the tunes English poets of the past have given him. The latest development, which seems to me a very fortunate one, has given us a Horatian Kipling. A sign of mellowing; and the teller of tales has mellowed with the poet, or even more.

LEWIS CARROLL

So austere was the paper I work for in 1865 that it did not condescend to notice 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.' However, in subsequent years, it reviewed, among other works by Lewis Carroll, all the later publications and his biography. It did not help to make him a classic of the nursery, but in due course it accepted him as such. Yet, when he was fully

established, it continued to exercise its right of criticism. With opportunities enough, for the dregs of Lewis Carroll were sorry stuff.

Lewis Carroll, as it seems to me, was the author of the Alice books and of the delicious 'Hunting of the Snark,' and of little else that need concern us in a world full of books that urgently demand attention. I have never read his biography; I know little of the man beyond the few anecdotes known to everyone; but I see his career as one of decline. 'From ourselves we pass away,' Æ. has lamented in a beautiful, characteristic poem: Lewis Carroll passed away from himself, and it is amusing to think, with Max, that the process, inverted, was one described by an Oxford contemporary so different as Walter Pater.

Pater's Prior Saint-Jean, author of an uncompleted treatise on mathematics, developed fantastically. 'Whereas in the earlier volumes you found by way of illustration no more than the simplest indispensable diagrams, the scribe's hand had strayed here into mazy borders, long spaces of hieroglyph, and as it were veritable pictures of the theoretic elements of his subject. Soft wintry auroras seemed to play behind whole pages of crabbed textual writing, line and figure bending, breathing, flaming into lovely "arrangements" that were like music made visible.' Lewis Carroll began in a world in which mathematics and fantasy were reconciled; he ended in one in which, so far as I have been able to explore it, mathematics and morality triumphed over fantasy.

There are those, my betters, who can write of the Alice books with that warmth of heart which, after all, is the condition of the finest criticism : myself, I cannot. For me, the case of Lewis Carroll is rather like the case of Gilbert. Heaven knows, I have no competence in matters of music, but it does seem to me that three-fourths of the effect of the operas is due to Sullivan. I do not mean merely that the music is finer than the words ; what I have in mind is that the peculiar mocking quality of the words, in the operas, is other than the words would have when simply read in a volume, and is due to the contrast between the poetic spirit of the music and the hard, narrow, prosaic wit of the words. Think, for an example out of many, of the contrast between ‘ Oh, Captain Shaw ’ and the music to which that jibing is set !

Now Lewis Carroll had as his one and only illustrator, for all successors are out of court, Sir John Tenniel. That Tenniel’s drawing, as drawing, is a delight I should be the last to contend ; he was a great cartoonist rather than a delightful draughtsman. But he fixed Alice and all the other characters so firmly that there was no alternative left to the reader’s imagination, and he did it with uncommonly little assistance from the text, though some from the author in a private capacity. It was, in its small way, a remarkable achievement. On the face of things, Lewis Carroll should have had an illustrator far more given to fantasy, a tender-hearted dreamer ; but, given such an illustrator, the fantasy would have drifted, lost all

definition, become utterly vague. Tenniel gave solidity, a sort of preposterous plausibility, to all those creatures of a mathematician's imaginative holiday.

All this is blasphemy, never to be forgiven by those who worship at the shrine of Lewis Carroll. But I too am of the faithful, in that I adore 'The Hunting of the Snark.' As there were strong men before Agamemnon, there were writers of nonsense verse before Lewis Carroll, and I chafe when I think that there is not anywhere a statue to O'Keefe, who produced that masterpiece, 'Amo, amas,' with its total absence of meaning and its irresistible appeal to the ear. There have been good writers of nonsense since : some day, when people have done praising the fine serious sonnets of Lord Alfred Douglas, they will recognize in him an extraordinary talent for sophisticated nonsense, for verse in which the rational intelligence has had no part, and which is pure nonsense as the best of Shelley is pure poetry. But give me 'The Hunting of the Snark.'

That it, and, for that matter, the Alice books, really mean much to children I take leave to doubt. Children, when not playing up to their elders, like a looser logic and less finished execution, and are not alive to the contrast of matter and manner. But the same thing may be said of most books and plays ostensibly addressed to children. It is the books originally intended for adults which, when a little adapted, chiefly delight children, as witness 'The Arabian Nights,' 'Robinson Crusoe,' 'Gulliver's Travels.' What we commonly called children's books are far

more valued by 'the elders whose hair has uncurled.' Mark Pattison said that an appreciation of Milton is the reward of culture. Well, it is when one has sighed, with Mallarmé, that the flesh is sad and that all the books are read, it is then that one collapses gratefully on to books professedly meant for children. My own latest reading of 'The Hunting of the Snark' was immediately after reading, twice, in the one sleepless night, 'Antony and Cleopatra'; the relish would have been still keener if I had taken Proust or that American of whom a woman told me during the chill orgy of a literary dinner as a preliminary.

And here we are entered upon a subject which, so far as I can remember, has never received due attention: what books gain or lose by being read after certain other books. There are masterpieces which seem, in my experience, to be totally unaffected by what one has been reading before; there are others which gain immensely when taken up as a change after very different literary diet. Balzac can be fully appreciated only when it is a case of the fifth or sixth volume read in unbroken succession. He is the only preparation for himself, and should be read, not occasionally, by odd volumes, but in great debauches, after which, for a while, all other fiction will seem thin and tepid. De Quincey should be read very rarely, never after Landor or Pater. Hazlitt, a great companion, seems hard and a little sinister if taken immediately after Lamb. But nonsense, Lewis Carroll's especially, is infinitely refreshing after psycho-analytical literature.

And yet, and yet, is there not something a little too tight, too constrained by logic, in Lewis Carroll for the perfect freedom craved by the nonsense-loving mind? Is there not something more spacious in the world created by Lear?

JAMES THOMSON

'THAT Thomson was a man of very remarkable and exceptional poetical talent is altogether beyond denial. The great defect of his verse lay in his "receptiveness." His second defect was his uncritical use of words. But with all these drawbacks Thomson had the stuff in him of a great poet, though he was not actually great.' So the chief literary periodical of the day wrote of him after his death. It was not a very friendly notice, but it was on the whole just to the poet if somewhat harsh on the rather peevish man. Here I am concerned only with the poet.

It was the misfortune of James Thomson, the second, to be labelled almost as soon as he was seriously noticed. 'The City of Dreadful Night' undoubtedly is his greatest achievement, but for reasons presently to be given it is unfair to Thomson to regard it as expressive of all that was in him. It is also unfair to him to follow his few apologists in pointing to his lighter work simply as evidence that he was not quite always immersed in melancholy. For the lighter work

was really a gallant, premature, pioneering enterprise ; undertaken, however, by a writer without the tact for it.

Those who look at an indiscriminate collection of volumes of verse published in the mid-Victorian period cannot but be impressed and fatigued by the constant solemnity in choice of subject and of manner. The major poets, especially Browning, are not in question : the middling and minor poets, with hardly an exception, seem to be in a conspiracy to forget that poetry has its caprices, may be inspired by almost any casualty of the day, may be the immortalization of mere whim, and that the poet may go with the muse as with a girl picked up at the next street corner. The solemnity of great poetic passion is one thing ; this other solemnity is a stupid attempt to exclude chance and the encounters of the human comedy from the material of art. Now against this stupidity Thomson's lighter work was, as far as it went, a useful protest.

He had, no doubt, some hints from Browning and from his favourite Heine, but there was a good deal of originality in ' Sunday Up the River ' and other things in which we find both genuine Cockney gaiety and genuine poetry, though hardly ever in fusion. The trouble was that this way, not quite Leigh Hunt's, of blending ' fancy and familiarity ' required a literary tact in which James Thomson was even more deficient than Hunt. From time to time he giggles where he should laugh ; he becomes vulgar, unnecessarily, in rendering vulgarity, and then by reaction much too

genteel. The very best of the component lyrics are just not adequately adjusted to their context ; so the beautiful little eighteenth piece in ' Sunday Up the River '—

The wine of Love is music,
And the feast of Love is song—

instead of raising the whole has the effect on it of a song by Shelley introduced into the book of a musical comedy. Thomson, unhappily, had been ' educated,' which is to say, put in a false position, with the usual results. But the gallantry of his attempt, and some momentary successes in it, must be acknowledged.

He set out on that attempt without the style it needed, and indeed everywhere, except in ' The City of Dreadful Night ' and ' Insomnia ' and perhaps four lyrics, he has nothing that can strictly be called a style. There is the prevalent influence of Shelley ; there are particular obligations to Browning and to Heine ; there are borrowings from the common stock of his period ; and there is his personal contribution : but there is no constantly unifying style. There is none, that is to say, until he abandons all attempt at variety, takes up with Latinate polysyllables and sonorous double rhymes, and gives us the heavily stressed, monotonous verse of ' The City of Dreadful Night.'

I have often wondered whether Thomson, before he came to write verse in that way, had read Fulke Greville Lord Brooke. It seems unlikely, for there have been few in any generation who have been familiar with

‘Mustapha,’ but there, in a certain Chorus, is the hint for him :

Oh, wearisome condition of humanity,
Born under one law, to another bound ;
Vainly begot, and then forbidden vanity,
Created sick, commanded to be sound !

In the Chorus from which I have quoted there is both the pessimism and something of the manner of Thomson. The pessimism he had no need to borrow of anyone ; it was inherent in him, and would not have been sensibly diminished by the marriage of which he was cheated, by sobriety, by any sort of success, even by religious faith in place of a crude atheism. Why anybody should think it necessary to apologize for his pessimism it is hard to guess. When a man’s philosophy has produced so magnificent a thing as the passage describing the Melancholia throned in the doomed city—

Unvanquished in defeat and desolation,
Undaunted in the hopeless conflagration
Of the day setting on her baffled prime—

it is justified in art ; and what worth it may have when abstracted from its artistic expression by a process of which only professors have the secret it is needless to enquire.

It is impossible that a man should make Thomson his frequent reading, but unintelligible that any fit reader of poetry should not exult rather than despair when in contact with that masterpiece. Thomson himself prefixed to it a two-fold defence. The weaker

part of it was his contention that here and there some fellow-sufferer would benefit by feeling a 'fellowship in all-disastrous fight.' The better, and indeed unquestionable, defence may be left in his own words :

Because a cold rage seizes one at whiles
 To show the bitter old and wrinkled truth
 Stripped naked of all vesture that beguiles,
 False dreams, false hopes, false masks and modes of youth ;
 Because it gives some sense of power and passion
 In helpless impotence to try to fashion
 Our woe in living words howe'er uncouth.

Writing out of a settled conviction, not out of any factitious Byronic melancholy, he expressed in 'The City of Dreadful Night' his own part of the truth, 'truth of winter and black night.' Except in some points of style and technique, he needs defence no more than Baudelaire.

Despite what has commonly been said of him, Thomson had more than one message. It was the morbid analyst who wrote :

Life liveth but in Life, and doth not roam
 To other realms if all be well at home :
 'Solid as ocean-foam,' quoth ocean-foam.

But the question is really not of messages but of artistic success, and if he could have perceived the conditions of success in his lighter work he would have given the world something to set in the balance against what, as things fell out, has heavily outweighed all his other writings.

EMILY LAWLESS

WHEN Mr. Yeats and Æ. and Synge prevailed, Emily Lawless gained nothing by their triumphs. She was, in a literary sense, not of their generation. She had not concerned herself with William Blake, like Mr. Yeats and Æ.; she had not made acquaintance, like Mr. Yeats and the youthful Synge, with the French Symbolists; and the rhythms of her prose and verse were not derived from the aboriginal rhythms of Irish speech and song. She was a little old-fashioned, superficially English enough, and at times rather amateurish, with her button-holing of the reader in the midst of narrative and such tricks as 'our hero.' All the same, she had been the interpreter, the apologist of Ireland, and before Synge had used the Arran islands, which gave her matter for her romance, 'Grania,' and for two of her best poems, so that it seemed rather hard she should not share in the victory.

Assuredly, she was not debarred from participation in it by any tepidness in defence of the indefensible characters and actions of Irish history. Look at those poems of hers about the Desmond war of the late sixteenth century! Or, indeed, at almost any passage in which she treats of the remoter grievances of Ireland. And here, not irrelevantly, for the sense of injury determined her artistic attitude, I must protest against what even my smattering of historical knowledge suffices to condemn. Emily Lawless made no allow-

ance whatever for the difficulties of the Tudors, or, for that matter, of their successors. Absenteeism : but it was not an English invention, it was Ireland's novel contribution to the feudal system, which had always assumed the identification of the lord with his lands. In part it was inevitable, Irish properties sometimes descending to heiresses who had married in England, but it was fiercely if spasmodically assailed by the Tudors. Henry VIII. even went so far as to enact that any absentee owner of Irish land should forfeit his possessions.

Again, as to the instruments of administration, Emily Lawless simply passed by the problems which shortened the lives of Tudor sovereigns and statesmen. Only two methods were open to them : they could govern either through English representatives or through Irish, and enormous difficulties were involved in both. For the use of English agency at once provoked revolts, in which some of the Irish factions would unite, and England having no standing army, and Parliament being willing to make military grants only in the event of extreme direct peril to English independence, the heavy cost of checking Irish rebellions fell on the Sovereign himself. But if Irish agency were employed, the sleepless jealousy of the Irish chiefs produced civil war. Also, the one great house that was loyal, that of Ormonde, was territorially isolated from Dublin, and a Viceroy who had to conquer or bribe his hereditary foe each time he moved between the seat of government and the mustering place of his adherents was in a hopeless plight.

I will not turn a literary appreciation into an historical argument, but it is necessary to take note of the blind spot in this writer's view of her material. Her work, so far as it deals with Irish history, suffers much from her inability to perceive that the tragedy, like all true tragedy, is the conflict of two rights, and not of pure right and unmitigated wrong. But, naturally, this weakens her romances and tales rather than her lyrics, in which circumstance can be forgotten, the ecstasy being all. Many of those lyrics have an historical setting; the title of her volume is 'The Wild Geese,' calling up the legend of those Irishmen, rebels, whom the merciless British allowed to sail away from Ireland after Aughrim and Limerick.

One exploit of the Wild Geese at least is known to everyone, the saving of Cremona but not of their careless General, Villeroy, for has it not come down to us in a familiar epigram?

Français, rendez grâce à Bellone !
Votre bonheur est sans égal :
Vous avez conservé Cremone,
Et perdu votre général.

But Emily Lawless, fortunately, dealt less with their achievements than with their nostalgia, and when someone makes an anthology of exile, for which in English there is not a great deal to draw upon, he will have to include with the one genuine poem written by Macaulay and the Jacobite poems of Swinburne and the innominate 'And we in dreams behold the Hebrides' some of these pieces by Emily Lawless.

Sorrowful, boastful, jesting, and desperate, her broken men with nothing more to lose speak to us in those poems in the authentic voice of the outcast, not with the sentimentality of Moore. But of what one calls the Celtic quality there is little. The diction, the images, the movement are such as we may find in virtually any good English poet of her generation; and I am not sure that the very best of her poems are not those two which, though written of one of the Arran islands, get clear of all national implications.

Here is part of that poem which was inspired by the grave of an unknown drowned man in a cemetery else occupied wholly by the graves of unbaptized children :

Little feet too young and soft to walk,
Little lips too young and pure to talk,
Little faded grass-tufts, root and stalk.

I lie alone here, utterly alone,
Amid pure ashes my wild ashes mingle ;
A drownéd man, without a name, unknown,
A drifting waif, flung by the drifting shingle.
Oh, plotting brain and restless heart of mine,
What strange fate brought you to so strange a shrine ?

And there is that other poem over a grave, connected with her romance, ' Grania ' ; a poem which I first read twenty-five years ago and have never been able to forget, small as it is, for it has the rare virtue of an individual and inevitable pattern which will let no line escape, the whole being bound together by the metrical scheme very curiously and yet naturally.

The prose of ' Grania,' of ' Hurrish,' of ' Traits and

Confidences' is less distinguished, but the feeling for Irish landscape and for the pathos of old, unhappy, far-off things are there also. I know nothing personal of their writer, except that she was the daughter of Lord Cloncurry and died fourteen or fifteen years ago ; on internal evidence I suspect that she would not have been a writer at all but for the impulse given her by Ireland, or at most would have written only a minute quantity of verse. But in her degree she succeeded, and she should not be neglected.

HEARN AS CRITIC

VIRTUALLY all the literary criticism produced by Hearn was addressed to an audience which knew nothing of the raw material of European literature or of the emotional atmosphere in which it was fashioned. It was those adverse conditions that made Hearn the lecturer so interesting. His reading, I believe, was simply that of the man who takes books as they come his way ; there were gaps in it, and it is likely that much of what he had read had been attacked at the wrong time. It is improbable that he carried in his head a clear map of the countries of the mind ; rather, some patches were very vivid to him and the rest vague and made out of report. His taste certainly was not impeccable, and, what is odd, it was not even finely perverse. Thus, drawn as he was towards some of the

subtlest and most antinomian of the French poets of the nineteenth century, he could be positively gushing about Longfellow—‘of all the poets of the age, none was so completely romantic as Longfellow, so ideal, so fond of the spiritual and the impossible,’ with much more, especially in praise of his ‘ghostliness.’ Thus, too, he could be perfectly serious in treating Owen Meredith as a poet.

But however sketchy and fallible Lafcadio Hearn may have been in treating of particular authors and epochs, he did, under compulsion, what few critics do : he looked at European literature from outside it. Lecturing to Japanese students, he could take nothing for granted. He was obliged to explain to them the suitability for literature of material which to us is so obviously suitable that we give no thought to what constitutes its fitness. He had to discuss every form, however familiar to him, on the assumption that his listeners knew nothing about it. He had to justify every stock eulogy and traditional label.

In what measure he succeeded in enabling his Japanese students to enter into alien modes of thought and feeling is uncertain, and it may even be that the young English poets who have since been employed on similar work in Japan have not been wholly successful. But that he benefited by the effort cannot be doubted, and anyone who will patiently read his reprinted lectures, which necessarily contain a good many platitudes, will benefit also. At the very least, the reader will gain a sense of the oddity of that

intellectual heritage in which he has been wont to take his ease.

So far as I remember, Hearn did not make the point, but to the outsider European culture must seem very queerly based. The Hellenic element in it, which needs no defence in discussion between Europeans, may strike the outsider as being allowed an extravagant importance ; but how much more extravagant must seem the prominence accorded to the Hebraic ! And how fantastic, what a nightmare muddle of ideas, must the outsider find the characteristic mythology of post-classical European literature. It is the rarest thing for any European who has not been in intellectual contact with Orientals to spend a moment's thought on it, but how obscure and widely separated are the origins of the central part of that mythology, the drama of revolt against God.

To the outsider it must appear wildly paradoxical that under monotheism should have developed, and among those most loyal to monotheism, the dualism which took literary form in the fifth-century poem, 'De Originali Peccato,' whose author, Avitus, is but a name, while his idea has never ceased to work in the most powerful creative minds of the West. Not less strange must it seem that peoples resolute in affirming the sufficiency of the Bible should have supplemented its account of heaven with the social guide to precedence provided by Dionysius the Areopagite. The outsider must gasp again over the impregnation of quasi-Biblical myth by Celtic or Teutonic legend, and

over the speedy enough reduction of the complicated product to something almost ready-shaped for art.

Roughly speaking, Oriental peoples have literary mythologies which sprang up in the one region and bear the impress of a particular cast of mind. The Hindu mind, for instance, though it has through many centuries performed remarkable gymnastics, has never been called upon to knead a multitude of alien ideas into coherent matter for literature. It has added much to itself, but mechanically, and the continual increase of its pantheon has not affected its central conceptions. But the European mind went through four or five centuries of such exercise in significantly relating myriads of alien myths that no mind unexercised in a similar way can truly grasp the suggestiveness of European literature.

Hearn, who did not venture on a history of such myths as have just been mentioned, did useful work as far as he went. Very many others, with little of his originality and courage, have endeavoured to explain European literature to Orientals, and Orientals have produced works of art in European languages. But the overtones, the indefinable suggestions, the depths beyond depths, in the most characteristic works of the romantic European mind are beyond explanation. To the outsider, if he gets as far even as that, European literature must appear overcharged with imaginative innuendo. It pleases people to give magic its home in the East, but the spells are here, in European literature, and especially in English poetry, of necessity mur-

murous with inner meanings, so that it gives only its avowed message to the outsider :

But all the while within we hear
How sweet, how different a thing.

THE LAST BOHEMIAN

IN one of the obituary notices of Ellen Terry, I find a sentence which takes the reader straight back to the palmy days of the British drama and of George Augustus Sala and Clement Scott—a sentence informing us that W. G. Wills was ‘the truest dramatic poet we have had since Shakespeare.’ I make no apology for reconsideration of a writer promoted, on anonymous but obviously respectable authority, to that dizzy eminence. Leaving out of account the immediate successors of Shakespeare, we have had poetic drama from Shelley, from Darley, from Robert Landor and his greater brother, from Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne, from Mr. Yeats, from other living poets whose names leap to memory. The man who surpassed all these must have been a man of rare poetic and dramatic genius. How is it that the world has forgotten him, or remembers him only as a contriver of opportunities for Henry Irving and Ellen Terry?

Wills has another claim, which has been allowed, though without acknowledgment of his authorship.

He wrote the words of 'I'll Sing thee Songs of Araby,' and those words are familiar enough ; but not one of ten persons who know them can recall the name of their writer. Hack writer for the Lyceum : that is the Wills known to most people, and those of an older generation. But 'the truest dramatic poet we have had since Shakespeare' was, all the same, a remarkable figure in his day. He had, from a good distance, very much the look of a man of genius, old style. In the 'sixties, 'seventies and 'eighties, quite a large number of people were aware of a very unkempt, often grossly unwashed, Bohemian creature who carried on, in a Fulham studio infested with cats, monkeys and beggars, the arts of painting and dramatic poetry. Stories about him abounded, especially stories of his absence of mind. His father, James Wills, an Irish clergyman, who had himself enjoyed a considerable literary reputation, was the actual hero of the anecdote about the man who put an egg in his pocket and hard-boiled his watch. W. G. Wills constantly did things only a little less preposterous. He was always inviting friends to dinner and going to their houses for his on the evening they came to his studio. He was always forgetting the names of old friends, calling famous persons by the names of those whom they detested, speaking thoughts that should be private to the company. Royalty, interested in his painting, commanded his presence, but he pleaded a previous engagement which turned out to be with royalty, and to have been made by the very same command. He borrowed his own money,

and gave away that which belonged to others in the belief it was his own. And so on, and so forth.

Dreamer, adventurer, child and sloven, he answered well enough, at long range, to the conventional idea of a man of genius. Only, the genius was not in him. Some instinct for the theatre he had, for he learned nothing from his experience of it, rarely attending rehearsals of his own plays and never a first-night of any of them, and knowing very little of dramatic literature in general. He knew how to sketch a character, usually in defiance of history, which would take the popular imagination, and how to devise a situation that would give scope for melodramatic or sentimental acting. Of literary style he was incapable, wallowing in high-flown clichés and the debased archaic phrases supposed to be Shakespearean. He never revised his manuscripts, saw to the printing of but two or three of his many plays, and was quite content that most of them should exist only in prompt copies with whatever alterations the Lyceum chose to make.

Once he did produce a presumably finished composition in verse, an epic, which was reviewed at length by his cousin, Oscar Wilde, and taken fairly seriously by some other men of letters. It was called 'Melchior,' and was dedicated to Browning. I looked into it once, a good many years ago, and can remember nothing of what little I read except that the blank verse, never technically good, had an occasional resounding phrase. His novels may have been more carefully fashioned than his dramas, but I have never so much as seen a

copy of one or met anyone who had read them, and cannot make even a report at second hand. It is at second hand that I advance 'Medea in Corinth' to the highest place among his earlier and better dramas; but is it conceivable that Wills, with his facile emotionalism and romantically commonplace style, can have dealt aright with so great a subject?

One thing must be allowed. However much his 'Charles I.' may have deserved the sharp things said by the critics in 1872, when they trounced him for a buffoon's treatment of Oliver Cromwell, and however unscrupulous he may have been in the provision of words for the scenario thrust on him by Wilson Barrett, he did a good piece of theatrical adaptation in 'Olivia.' The literary good breeding of Goldsmith he, of course, could not reproduce; but he made out of 'The Vicar of Wakefield' an actable piece which, with Ellen Terry in it, seems to have given a great deal of pleasure to playgoers quite capable of detecting maltreatment of the original material. For the rest, it seems better to think of 'the truest dramatic poet since Shakespeare' as an oddity, a character, belonging to a period when to be a sloven in life and work was thought half-way to being a man of genius.

Irish, of that Ireland into which Mr. Yeats and Æ. and Synge had not been born, he was for all his idiosyncrasy in some ways typical of the old-style Irish literary adventurer, and may be granted his vague place in the shambling procession headed by William Maginn. He had the usual shiftlessness, fluency,

sentimentality, contentment with effect where the artist seeks achievement. 'Essentially untrue to history, as well as mistaken in point of literary art,' said a critic with a severity which seems rather misplaced towards an easy-going, squalid, kindly creature with after all a certain amount of talent but with no serious artistic ambition. Westland Marston, who once worked with him, was a much more careful and estimable writer, but if we regard Wills as simply the means of giving Irving and Ellen Terry certain opportunities we shall be disposed to gentleness. It was not very nice of him to write a comic part for Cromwell, but then it was not very nice of the Lyceum to arrange that the actor playing Cromwell should also appear as Mr. Tarazacum Twitters in the farce that followed. Wills was of his age, and it was not an age that expected veracity or intellectual distinction in dramatic literature. Its comedies and farces it filched from the French; its tragedies were without an idea when they were actable, or were written by poets with a deliberate indifference to the stage.

MRS. OLIPHANT

It is certain that the value of an autobiography does not depend on the achievements of its author. We can, of course, persuade ourselves that we read St. Augustine, Cellini or Rousseau because religion, art or the

theory of the social contract matter greatly to us, but it is difficult to find an exterior reason, except the basest, for reading Casanova, and quite impossible to found admiration of Haydon's tremendous confession on the megalomaniac pictures he painted. The utmost contempt for Haydon the artist can co-exist with a thrilled appreciation of his autobiography. So it is not to be assumed that if I eulogize Mrs. Oliphant's fragmentary record of her life I am enamoured of her fiction. I shall have something to say presently of her best story, but for the moment I am concerned only to praise her autobiography as one of the most honest, gallant and moving things in its kind known to me.

Mrs. Oliphant was a woman for whom nothing went right for any length of time. As one reads her autobiography one grows anxious at the turn of the page, since calamity is never far off, and yet one can hardly wish calamity away, for what she in her modest way called her 'obstinate elasticity,' what we may rightly call her heroism, is adequate to every demand on it. Her husband died, after wretched journeys in search of health, and she was left with her children to bring up. Her assets were £200, some furniture, her pen, then not very much exercised; she owed £1,000. She had suffered terribly when her mother died, and with her usual candour records how in her grief she had rejoiced to be free of the burden of night-nursing. She had lost her infant children; and the autobiography she wrote for her other children, to whom she was passionately devoted, was not to be finished till they were dead.

She had to support a valetudinarian brother, and eventually to educate his son out of the proceeds of her writing. That nephew, loved as a son, died in India when her hopes of him were highest. When there was no one left to slave for, she herself died ; it is impossible to think of her as living on for herself.

As a record of plain, practical, selfless literary heroism her autobiography is hardly to be matched. The story of the supreme novelist's labours goes to the head like wine, and I will confess that once when I had been reading Balzac's correspondence and came on some passage in which the gross, magnificent creature stood up, grimed with toil, to boast of success, I opened a bottle of Burgundy to honour his triumph as if it had been a friend's. But here in the small feminine novelist's story there are no triumphs. Her highest successes, as she very well knows, are lower than those to which she would have attained in normal conditions. She sacrificed everything for her own children and her nephew, and lived to see the sacrifice had been in vain. Worse, she was often visited by the thought that by going her own way, writing less, allowing herself occasional respite, she might after a few years have been in a position to do more for them.

Mrs. Oliphant was of those martyrs who are denied the consolation of illusions. Not only could she see that her sacrifices had been rendered futile by the death of every one of those for whom they had been made ; she could see her martyrdom in perspective. And the refuge of cynicism was not open to her.

Not a great or even a fine novelist, she was to the core a woman of letters, with that courage of the intellect which the world must not be asked to understand but which men of letters should honour as the priests, the doctors, the soldiers honour the special courage of their callings. While she was writing her autobiography, the last survivor of the children so dear to her died ; and she noted that the tone of her autobiography ought therefore to be altered. It had been begun for her children ; it would have another body of readers ; it was for her to adapt it to the new audience. If we cannot without extravagance say, *Qualis artifex*, at least we may say, *Qualis opifex*.

Her first book appeared in 1849, her last in 1898, and for several decades she produced two, three or four books a year, besides doing a great deal of magazine work. In 1877 she published books on Cervantes, Dante and Molière, besides three novels ; and let no one assume that her literary criticism was a novelist's hasty book-making. She was not an exact scholar, and in her day a woman was almost bound to take a conventionally feminine view of certain matters ; but it was Mrs. Oliphant who said of Tennyson that the acrid element in him would save him from his romanticism, and of George Eliot that she was a dull woman with genius as an appendage. Such things are ready on the lips of everyone now, but it took a shrewd and independent woman to say them in Mrs. Oliphant's day.

In all of her work known to me there are evidences of real observation, of feeling for character, of an ear

for prose rhythm ; and there is one story in which she scored almost greatly. ' A Beleaguered City ' comes within an inch of being a masterpiece of its sort. The idea of the inhabitants of the city being expelled by the ghosts of its former inhabitants is immense, and there are few ghosts more plausible than Mrs. Oliphant's always felt, never presented *revenants*. One fault the book has, in method, in the rather tiresome device of a story told by several narrators, but for the rest it is masterly. The mayor of the Burgundian town (it is not really a city) is an excellent invention. The admirable bourgeois, with his irritated devotion to his wife, his official fussiness and real efficiency, his parochialism and his underlying susceptibility to large influences, is put before us without parade but with a quiet skill that deserves the warmest praise. And the spiritual implications of the story are touched with real imagination.

MARRYAT

IF there has ever been a full and satisfactory biography of Marryat, it has never come my way ; and, indeed, all I know of his life, apart from what may be found in his novels, consists of a few anecdotes and a few official facts. One of the anecdotes gives a very agreeable impression of Marryat after his retirement from the sea. In the interests of discipline, it appears, he would

once a week parade his children and review in naval martinet style their conduct. The good would then be given gifts as a reward for their goodness, the naughty gifts in consolation for rebuke, and the outraged governess a gift to reconcile her to this system. There is another story of his waking up at night and suddenly deciding that Austria or Hungary was the country in which to make a fortune, and trying to persuade his brother to set out with him for that Eldorado before dawn. There are some anecdotes of him as a farmer : he was convinced that sailors always made good farmers, and proved it by producing fowls at about five pounds each and vegetables at their weight in silver. And there are two stories about him and flogging, illuminating in their contradiction. William IV. stopped his promotion because he had written against flogging ; but when he stood for Parliament and was asked by a voter whether he would in any circumstances countenance such brutal punishment, he offered to flog his prospective constituent.

These are things out of a very hazy memory, but I fear what I am about to say of his books will spring from almost as vague a foundation. He is not only read in popular form but collected ; one bookseller in London seems always to be acquiring and vending complete sets of Marryat ; and I have found him in the glory of one of the finest modern bindings ever seen by me. But he is not inevitably read by my tribe. He is not one of those primary writers or one of those consummate artists to whom one reverts for one's own

pleasure every few months, and he does not inevitably lie in the way of the literary journalist as part of his work.

To be frank, there is another reason for loss of touch with him. There has been done for him on a small scale what was done in the 'seventies and 'eighties on a vast scale for Dickens. For some twenty years a leader-writer on the *Daily Telegraph* was required to quote or to allude to Dickens in every article ; there was never a journalistic school which positively insisted on citation of Marryat in and out of season, but the abounding Philistines of the plain-shrewd-British-public type liked to work him in whenever they could. Dickens, Marryat, Surtees, were made a nuisance by various classes of writers of that period in which George Augustus Sala was a great man, Burnand the coming humorist, and someone or other the perfect writer on the sporting life. One recoils from the works of such people unless one is very robust indeed.

Of course, the accident of being much admired by the worst judges does not harm a great writer with any sane critic. But the lesser writers are not proof against damage, and he who has 'subbed' the copy of survivors of the palmy days of English journalism, deleting Dickens and Marryat and Surtees, though he may remain loyal to the very great man becomes disinclined to read the small men so tiresomely thrust upon him. The remedy is to revive the memories of boyhood, when one read Marryat in solitude and with great pleasure. Looking back, one sees that he

belonged, by virtue of many of his most telling qualities, to the family of Smollett, and by reason of other qualities to the physical high spirits school of which such still smaller writers as the lively Smedley were members. The somewhat brutal hold on fact was of the eighteenth century, some of the vivacity was of the high jinks early nineteenth-century group.

Now the high jinkers mostly give normal people a headache. There are persons who voluntarily, and at high cost, for the illustrations are coveted, read that knock-me-down stuff by Pierce Egan, whose only redeeming feature in my weak eyes was having a nephew, a London restaurateur of some repute, with the surprising name of Pentecost. But the one work of art that came out of a brawling that may have begun with the intellectual excuse of Christopher North in Edinburgh, but was mostly vulgar roistering in London, was the gay, inconsequent eulogy of boxing by that charming creature John Hamilton Reynolds, the friend of Keats. In Marryat the boisterousness is casually subservient to his real business as a novelist, and it is sometimes very well done, but it is not by it that he kept one reading when one did read him.

It was by a kind of very human glow, a quick identification of himself with his characters. There is no anecdote to show that he laughed and cried with his people as the elder Dumas did, but he must have done so. He put an immense deal of himself into them, not merely because they were seamen and he had been a naval officer. He lived with them, and the brutality

ceased to matter through the warmth of that sympathy, and the faults of style were no more to be heeded than the slips in the eager speech of a warm-hearted, vividly amused or excited speaker. He was good reading for boys where Smollett is bad reading, and no one can ever have been brutalized by him.

Character and episode, not plot and a steady view of whole lives, are the concern of Marryat, though in 'Japhet' there is both a plot and unity of feeling, of which latter there is even more in 'Snarleyow.' Character, I have said, but I should rather say characters. That is in the English tradition which culminated with Dickens, and in this way Marryat may be regarded as a link between Smollett and Dickens, though in generous grotesque he never approaches the more vital humorist. His English is nearer Smollett's than anyone else's, rather more careless, but uncorruptive in diction, clear and brisk, sometimes of a surprising vigour, and a very good medium for his matter. It is not that he has that instinct for style which has often been possessed by men of action; we are not to look for those astonishing and inevitable phrases which we find in Wellington, and of which 'The Duke is much exposed to poets' may be the very finest. But Marryat is full of his subject, and the warmth with which he writes guards him against trickery and pretentiousness.

Dickensians can doubtless tell us when and how often Dickens read Marryat, but we do not need any information from them to see whence Dickens got a

certain kind of abrupt dialogue. But there is no occasion to promote him to historical importance as founder of a school. It is enough that in his kind of work he has had no superior, and only one rival, Michael Scott, author of 'Tom Cringle's Log.'

W. J. LINTON

THE name Linton means Mrs. Lynn Linton, and recalls her historic article on 'The Girl of the Period'; but there was a Linton who was a great deal more than merely her husband. Indeed, he was not that, in any significant sense, for very long. They separated, amicably, rather early in their married life, and his career was along lines very far from being hers.

William James Linton was primarily a wood-engraver, the finest of a generation which had several admirable workers in that kind. Secondarily, he was a Radical journalist, editing at one time the *National*, afterwards, with G. H. Lewes and Thornton Hunt, the *Leader*. He was forty when, in 1852, he appeared anonymously as a poet, to be immediately recognized by the aged Walter Savage Landor, who wrote him a congratulatory poem beginning: 'Praiser of Milton! worthy of his praise.' Twelve or thirteen years went by before he published a volume of verse under his own name. Shortly after this he went finally to America, and the rest of his long life was devoted to engraving,

printing, and the production of lyrics and excellent translations from French verse.

Meredith has a poem expressive of his ideal of mellow age with the beautiful conclusion :

And ancients musical at close of day.

It would be hard to think of a happier illustration than Linton. Nearly all his best verse was written late in life, some of it when he was nearly seventy, and it sings of matutinal things not in any affectation of boyishness, which would have been detestable, but with the zest of one who has never suffered himself to be soured or satiated. At seventy he can say :

With flowers and love and wine and song,
O Death ! life hath not been too long.

How should it have been too long for a man who had so ' saved the bird in his bosom ' ? Experience had left him, in the fine sense, innocent ; age had given him the right to take liberties in love poetry, and his own literary tact and a wise following of Landor enabled him to take them without possibility of offence. He had sweetness without mawkishness, a gentle gaiety, a delicate conviviality ; and if the singing voice was frail, why, what else would you have from an ancient musical at close of day ?

Do I overpraise Linton ? Small poets of his order, especially if neglected, ought to be overpraised, in the tone which implies we are eulogizing a charming old gentleman, not pronouncing judgment on a solemn artist. We are not ' placing ' him, in a contest he would

smilingly have declined to enter ; we are liking him, for the qualities which warm us to a friend without consideration of his fitness to be Prime Minister, Archbishop of Canterbury, or Poet Laureate. And, for myself, I like the man I divine through his verses, as I like, for rather different reasons, or on rather different pretexts, that other small poet, Thomas Ashe. At this moment, in the heat of writing about him, I would give up the stateliest of literary banquets for the pleasure of sitting opposite him, in that converse which binds all appreciators of wine together, and hearing him recite his poem of infidelity.

It is a little too long to quote in full, but here, in pedestrian prose, is its argument. He is confessing to his love that he has loved two others before, and loves them still, one blonde, the other rich-blushing. And then :

German the first, the other French :
I loved them, Dear ! before
I courted you. You jealous wench !
What never see them more ?

Nay, by the lovely golden-haired,
By her whose blush I own,
You'll pardon, their sweet names declared,
—Moselle and Rose-Bourgogne.

To think that was written in what is now the country of Prohibition ! But the world degenerates, and as we peer about it we can only observe with Wordsworth equally a want of cooks and men.

But the ancient who wrote that and the perfect

translation of Armand Gouffé's ironical praise of water—

'Tis water makes us drink
Of wine, of wine, of wine—

had very different moods. To convey his quality by brief quotation is not possible, for as it happened he wrote no single piece in which all his characteristic merits were concentrated. I might, perhaps, cite 'Sleeping on Latmos,' a pretty fancy ; or 'The Prayer to Diana,' where the poetry culminates in a delicious touch of humour in the answer of the goddess. But perhaps, considering how little space I have for quotation, I had better reproduce the graver 'Spring and Autumn.'

It seems a trifle, and assuredly it is not in any way a big poem, but the last two lines were not written by a trifler :

'Thou wilt forget me.' 'Love has no such word.'
The soft Spring wind is whispering to the trees,
Among lime-blossoms have the hovering bees
Those whispers heard ?

'Or thou wilt change.' 'Love changeth not,' he said.
The purple heather cloyes the air with scent
Of honey. O'er the moor her lover went
Nor turned his head.

But quotation is useless. At least thirty of Linton's tiny poems must be read, repeatedly, in the right mood, before anyone can fully respond to him.

And the translations are nearly as necessary to appreciation of him as the original pieces. He did

Béranger extremely well ; Charles d'Orléans well, but in competition with those who have done him better ; and, most astonishingly, the ' Chasseur Noir ' of Victor Hugo. But he also had his moment with Latin. This is one of many versions he made of the ' Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle ' of Catullus :

With none, that woman tells me, would she wed
 Except with me : No ! not with Jove himself.
 Believe her ? take a summer wind to bed ;
 Or keep your running water on a shelf.

And, indeed, he scarcely ever touched anything as poet, engraver, translator, except to some pleasant issue.

ROSSETTI AND HIS PUBLISHER

SEEING that Rossetti, in his last phase, was a Hamlet destined to no better companions and biographers than Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, we can hardly be given too many original documents as material for our judgment of him. What Mr. Doughty offers us in ' The Letters of D. G. Rossetti to his Publisher ' is a fully, even excessively but always accurately, annotated edition of the hitherto unpublished correspondence of Rossetti with F. S. Ellis, having reference mainly to the ' Poems ' of 1870. The letters are mostly brief, concerned with the minutiae of book-production, and too businesslike to be fully revelative of their writer's personality ; but the reader who studies them in

conjunction with Rossetti's other correspondence of 1869-70 will be in a better way towards understanding the character of the man and the temper in which he at long last appeared before the general public as a poet.

W. M. Rossetti, loyal to facts but seldom quite sensitive enough to circumstances, did a great deal to encourage the belief that Dante Gabriel thought of himself as primarily a poet, only secondarily a painter. It is true enough that Dante Gabriel, when he had set about preparing the volume of 1870, often said as much; but the conviction was reached only when trouble with his eyesight had forced him to consider the possibility of permanent inability to paint. And this has an important bearing on the problem, be it ethical or only one of taste, of his conduct in directing the exhumation of the poems buried in his wife's grave. For the Rossetti who, after seven years, so recovered the text of his principal poems was not a man hopeful of a great future as a painter and coveting also fame as a poet: he was a man who, with some excuse though erroneously, feared that he would soon be totally debarred from painting, and who thus returned to poetry as his sole consolation. The decision made, there was an overwhelmingly strong reason, a reason much more creditable to Rossetti than mere vanity, for the anxiety with which, in this correspondence with his publisher, he is found arranging a good reception for the volume. What has been recovered at such cost to his feelings must not even seem to be unworthy of the sacrifice made for it, and instant, abundant applause

must justify in his own eyes a man who at moments doubts 'whether it was all worth while.'

At the moment of poetic triumph, and it must be remembered that from 1870 to October of 1871, when Buchanan's attack was published, Rossetti had little but praise, he was already in part the overwrought creature of the final period. The chloral had been begun while he was working on the text; the whisky, which, with the chloral and Fanny Schott, finally broke him down, was being absorbed in bulk; and he had discovered that sonnets meant insomnia. But the old, resolute, confident, Rabelaisian Rossetti of the 'sixties reasserted himself fitfully. Even this mainly business-like correspondence with Ellis gives us glimpses of him, as in rude references to the anticipated hostility of Buchanan, and in a limerick about his own friend Dallas, the contents of which were not determined wholly by the scarcity of rhymes to that name. For the most part, however, these letters show him occupied with the question of format and the problem of working the critical Press. Will Ellis see that the block-maker so deals with the beautiful cover-design as to thicken rather than thin its lines? Would red-gold be better for the binding? May he have proofs in this colour and that? All this, apart from its interest for the student of Rossetti the designer, has a certain value as showing the material counterpart of spiritual indecisions revealed in his other correspondence of the same period. More generally amusing is his plotting to get friendly critics heard before the hostile and the

doubtful receive review copies. The eulogists are carefully marshalled: Swinburne, in the *Fortnightly*; William Morris, in the *Academy*; Skelton; Stillman; Sidney Colvin; Joseph Knight, who is to deal with the book in two papers; Dr. Hake. But this is only the beginning. The exhibition of Rossetti as his own Press agent is complete and impressive.

At the very end, with reference to the volume of new verse published a decade later, we have a sight of a friend who was eventually to surpass even Rossetti in that business: Watts-Dunton is to have the dedication of that volume because he has intimated that his heart is set on having it. But, as regards the earlier volume, all the sincere and fervent eulogies, followed by the quite brisk sale of the book, could not compensate Rossetti for Buchanan's attack on him. Swinburne, who made friends with Morley quite soon after Morley's terrific denunciation of him, was amazed that Rossetti could feel all panegyrics cancelled by the petty abuse of a single pseudonymous poetaster; but within two years even Swinburne's own magnificent public tribute, that 'dear act of friendship,' was held to have been wiped out by a few words of moderate private remonstrance. Rossetti by then was lamentably ready to suspect his best friends, ready to collapse into the arms of those who ministered to the caricature of the regal, casually commanding man he had been and presently peddled out their recollections of 'the real Rossetti.'

M. P. SHIEL

THERE is Sir Thomas Browne's authority, if any be needed, for the capriciousness of man's memory of things memorable ; and to be surprised that this writer has been kept in recollection and that writer in an equally popular *genre* forgotten is to confess to simplicity. The tale of terror has always been popular ; well, perhaps the most original and horrible of such tales, the ' Justified Sinner ' of Hogg, had fallen into oblivion when it was dug out by me four or five years ago. Parody and *pastiche* with an element of parody are not unpopular, yet the most imaginative volume of poetical parodies in the language was until lately unreprinted, and the best volume of prose imitations tinged with mockery is neglected, and how many people to-day read Sir Frederick Pollock's consummate ' Leading Cases ' ? One of the best satirical and philosophical romances in English, and in English of a singular purity, has been not much less than a century out of print. And so on.

Why, then, should one be astonished that a master of shock tactics such as M. P. Shiel should have remained till now in the shadow that quite unreasonably fell on him some fifteen years ago while the general public and the intellectuals alike clamour for ' shockers ' ? His works have been reissued, and that, not the mystery of neglect after popularity, is what matters. They will create a sensation. I do not say it

will be a greater sensation than they created between thirty and twenty years ago, but it will probably be one more enduring. For I think Shiel may have suffered from apparent association with modes that were going out of favour and publishers who were dated or unfortunate. But one can hardly expect for him a more distinguished or varied body of admirers than he had then.

Some of the names I am about to write in a rough indication of his quality are too great for the comparison, and some may suggest qualities more obvious in their work than in Shiel's, but he has in him something of Poe, of Barbey d'Aurevilly, as well as of Borel, Maturin, Corvo. But what is the good of using these names? Poe means to us more than the fabricator of certain horrors; and at the other extreme Maturin, though the root of the dreadful matter is in him, is too tawdry in a bygone fashion to be readable now. Barbey I bring in for nothing more than the famous 'style of tiger's blood and honey,' preposterous enough to justify the definition, but not to be resisted once one has tasted the compound. Shiel had better be considered apart.

He began writing about thirty-four years ago, and was active for rather more than twenty years, after which, so far as I know, he virtually ceased to write for ten years, resuming quite lately. Of some twenty novels, seven or eight, chiefly the early ones, were given to the magazine or other indiscriminate public, and yet highly admired by men of letters. That is to

say, Shiel apparently achieved the dream of those who write stories of mystery, terror or adventure, getting the millions who, like children, want a story and those few hundreds who choose carefully what they will read. The Pearsons, the Harmsworths published serially what connoisseurs were glad to have as books.

The two main merits of such of his tales as I read twenty odd years ago were the largeness of the central idea and the flaming romanticism of the style. Both merits are very rare in work of the kind. Writers of mystery or adventure stories, or, more broadly, of serial melodrama, usually pride themselves on their ingenuity ; and if they have ingenuity, the stories may 'intrigue,' as the cant phrase goes, or excite us ; but the trick of the thing, once explained, is explained away ; whereas Shiel's central idea remains in the mind long after the reader knows what the issue is. Fantastic, gruesome, what you will, it really is an idea. And like most genuine ideas, it is of a massive simplicity.

Then there is the flushed romantical style, breaking out into an extravagant efflorescence. Romanticism run mad, it might be said. But frequently there is, amid the hot colouring and the frenetic vigour, a surprising propriety of simile and metaphor. Take this, from a melodramatic passage :

With anguished gradualness, as a glacier stirs, tender as a nerve of each leaf that touched me, I moved, I stole, toward her through the belt of bush, the knife behind my back—steadily though slow—till there came a restraint, a check—I felt myself held back—had to stop—one of the sheaves of my beard having caught in a limb of prickly-pear.

The amount of things said in those few lines is matter for wonder.

‘As a glacier stirs, tender as a nerve of each leaf that touched me’: those are words that would have been applauded in Stevenson, because his way of writing invited readers to be on the alert for felicities. But here, in Shiel, the similes are not merely new and remarkable; they are very much to the purpose, and convey the icy cruelty and nervous agitation of the dual man. And the grotesque check to his murderous progress is an invention reconciling us to the purpose of his evil self by its reminder of the savagery into which he has fallen as supposedly, for all purposes till this encounter actually, the one survivor on a poisoned earth.

I take the passage from the only volume by Shiel that I have lately read again, ‘The Purple Cloud.’ It used to be thought his best book; it is, at any rate, the best of those I know. The matter of it necessitated an awkward explanatory framework, but I cannot think the author need have been quite so clumsy, or so long, in getting us to the situation in which we can read the narrative of the last man in the world. Far as Campbell’s poem on the last man may be from satisfying us, for it is rhetoric, not poetry, at least it hurls us into the situation; and though prose narrative cannot have the liberty of poetry, Shiel is too dilatory and circumlocutory, too sceptical of the capacity of readers for a ‘willing suspension of disbelief.’ Yet, even if one could bring oneself to skip a page, it would be

dangerous to do so. One would miss, most likely some strange fancy, some wild phrase, which one would afterwards regret not having experienced at first-hand.

BRET HARTE

PHYSICALLY, Bret Harte died twenty-seven years ago, writing to the last ; for almost all literary purposes, he had been dead years earlier. The very late 'sixties and the very early 'seventies were the period in which his very distinctive, narrowly limited talent produced its best—certain verses which, without being exactly poetry, get at one in a queer way, and certain stories which are both not quite real and movingly human. Someone who seems to have been a journalist concerned with dramatic criticism wrote a book about him in the year of his death, but I cannot call to mind any serious attempt to define and estimate his achievement. The lack of considered criticism, however, is not surprising, for Bret Harte came to readers here at a time when American humorists were being imported in considerable bulk for popular consumption, and superficially his work, even the best of it, seemed the sort of stuff to be taken along with magazine matter in general.

There must still be people who can tell us all about those American humorists of yester-year : I cannot be informative on the subject. To be sure, I know that one of them, and he would be rather earlier, was

Orpheus C. Kerr, supposed to be a very witty pseudonym for a place-hunter; but of him I can recollect nothing except that he was the fifth, or sixth, or seventh husband of Adah Isaacs Menken, the pretext rather than the inspiration of 'Dolores,' an amiable as well as a beautiful creature, and so conscientious in her profession of courtesan that she resigned her position with the author of 'Dolores' because she was not earning her wages. Then there was Max Adler; but what he did, beyond the story of the orator who, booked to speak late in the evening, found all his points taken away by predecessors, and fled from the audience, it is impossible to remember. There were many others. Mark Twain and Bret Harte, who were writers, got mixed up with such purveyors of amusement, unjustly.

What Mississippi experiences were to Mark Twain, experiences of mining camps were to Bret Harte. But one can imagine Mark Twain making something of material taken out of more normal and sophisticated life, and it is very difficult to think of Bret Harte at work successfully on any but that odd material, drawn from a life in which the melodramatic and the homely were mingled, and which was at so far a remove from at any rate his English readers, as indeed from most of his American, that questions of probability scarcely arose. The art of the man was in his power to combine great truth to sentiment with oddity and even unreality in incident, the inner humanity of the story carrying off the fantastic or melodramatic narrative.

Because somewhere among his verses is a piece about rugged miners, or other scallywags, weeping when Dickens is read to them, or perhaps for the larger reason that the world is richly populated with fools, the name of Dickens is dragged into discussions of Bret Harte. Now Bret Harte has none of the energy, exuberance, English humour of Dickens, and he has, at his best, a skill in the short story and an unpretending choiceness to which Dickens neither attained nor aspired. But what names will not hasty critics introduce, tempted by some similarity of subject or method? A writer in 1902, showing intelligence as well as admiration of Bret Harte and of Mr. Frank Harris, must needs spoil all by saying that Bret Harte's best story was the finest thing of its sort except for 'Elder Conklin.' But there could not be two writers more antithetical than those two.

The triumph of Mr. Frank Harris, who wrote some of the most powerful short stories produced in his day, was in showing us life, chiefly in its ugly aspects, as through a colourless, perfectly transparent glass. His method was to abolish method, his style a thing of which we were not to be aware at all. At his best he did not write *about* things; he wrote the things. It is not the way of the very greatest or the most exquisite writers, with whom there is always their own heightening and colouring of the matter in the process of conveying it to us. It is not even accordant with the ideal of so flat-footed and short-sighted a naturalist as Zola, who, after all, defined art as nature seen through

a temperament, meaning a temperament of which we shall be conscious as we read. But it is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do, and it was done perfectly not only in such stories as 'Elder Conklin,' but in 'The Miracle of the Stigmata.' Imagine proposing anything of the sort to Bret Harte !

It was the genius of Bret Harte to be at once real and unreal, warm with true sentiment and the teller of an evidently fanciful tale. When he was himself, he fused reality and unreality, or, if that be impossible, mingled them in such a way that we know not whether we believe or disbelieve, and do not care. It is our not caring that entitles him to the most cordial applause. For, in ninety-nine fictions out of a hundred, the moment a doubt arises all is lost. But here is humanity in fancy dress, the roughness of it making no difference to the fact that it is fancy dress, and we may take a smiling pleasure in the masquerade and yet be moved by the genuine sentiments of the figures. The word 'sentiments' is used advisedly : Bret Harte does not venture on the passions.

The critic in 1902 thought that Bret Harte might have done more as a writer of serious verse, and instanced that poem of the lost galleon, which, due in 1649, missed its 9th of May, and therefore could not reach port till 1949. He might have cited the poem of the drum summoning a nation to just warfare, and that other poem of the bullet finding its predestined victim. But surely the effect on us of the serious poems of Bret Harte is due to the fact that he was not osten-

sibly a serious poet—an effect comparable, with some qualification, to that which Charles Lamb makes on us with ‘The Old Familiar Faces.’ In neither case is verse quite the natural medium; it argues a rare emotion that it should be used at all; and, coming to us in a stammer, gives us a queer, almost unmanning emotion, like the inadequate utterance of a bereaved friend.

With comic verse he had some successes that will never be forgotten. ‘The Heathen Chinees,’ owing its popularity in America partly to the agitation over immigrant Chinese labour, was not only witty in itself but the cause of wit in another, Hilton, whose ‘Heathen Passee’ is among the very best pieces of academical fooling we have. The archæological dispute in another famous piece is not less entertaining. But it is ultimately by five or six stories, ‘The Outcasts,’ ‘M’liss,’ ‘Roaring Camp,’ and his own favourite, ‘Tennessee’s Partner,’ among them, that Bret Harte takes rank.

CLOUGH

THERE is nothing more irritating in Victorian literature than the public spectacle, quite common in the ‘forties and ‘fifties, of men of talent or genius unable to make up their minds whether they believe or not, their blood, as a great Victorian poet contemptuously said of them, at once inflamed and enfeebled by gnat-stings of faith

and scepticism. Great literature has been made through the ages out of courageous doubt and out of profound faith, but no man can make anything worth the making out of half-hearted scepticism soothed by a half-held creed, and the recurrent ague-fits of certain Victorians, with the whimpering literature produced in them, excite in a sane mind the sort of nausea felt by Whitman when he wished to live with animals because they do not spend themselves in confessions of sin and are not respectable or ashamed. Arthur Hugh Clough, no doubt, was one of the best and most nearly amiable of those who set themselves ethical puzzles and nearly consoled themselves with almost achieved belief, but on his weaker side he was of the tribe. He was also of the tribe of those who are thrust upon us as greater than their work. And altogether it is difficult not to lose patience with him.

But Carlyle did not call him 'a diamond in the general refuse-heap' for nothing; it was not without cause that Matthew Arnold devoted to his memory one of the five finest elegies we have. He is worth looking at through the eyes of a detached and intelligent contemporary. About a week after he died, with many things half done, the *Saturday Review* had a long article on him which probably gives as just a view of the man and his work as can be obtained. Recalling that as a boy and as a youth Clough had aroused very high expectations, and that the promise had faded out, the *Saturday Reviewer* set about explaining his failure. It was due, he thought, 'to an excess of feeling and

scrupulousness and intellectual activity, and a deficiency in clearness of thought, in the gift of expression, and in physical spirits.' He might have quoted that great saying of Keats about what goes to make a man of attainment—'negative capacity,' willingness to accept ideas, emotions, impulses which come to a man with mysterious validity, without harassment to discover whence they have that validity. For the artist, of all people, to demand of every urging a reference from some respectable authority is absurd.

Clough seems to have had what Mr. Gladstone, describing someone else, called 'an ungovernable conscience.' One cannot in fairness go further and say, what could be said of certain of his contemporaries, that he had a pampered conscience. Duty really was for him Wordsworth's 'stern daughter of the voice of God,' though rather too garrulous for dignity. Would that with the Wordsworthian artistic reverence for her he could have acquired some of Wordsworth's obduracy! But, alas, it could not be remarked of him as it was of the master, that when he had written an ode to Duty he had done with her. He was always listening to her, and she was talkative and contradictory.

For Wordsworth, his wisdom admirably buttressed by massive stupidity, there was nothing doubtful. He was sure that he was a very great poet, and that the production of poetry mattered supremely. His attitude, though he was incapable of the cynicism necessary for recognition of its nature, was pretty much that of the Regency statesman who said he had the

greatest regard for religion, but if religion was going to interfere with a man's private life——! Wordsworth's head, half divine and the other half mulish, was bowed in reverence to Duty, but if Duty was going to interfere with a poet's activity, so much the worse for her. It was so much the worse for Clough.

He remains an important and rather touching and rather annoying exhibit at the inquest on early Victorian faith or scepticism or whatever it was. If we wish to know what was felt at Oxford by the more earnest spirits of the period, his are the works to consult. Arnold's Rugby and the Oxford of the early 'forties made him, and then he became one of the central figures in a set which included some of the best minds of the time. He could guide no one, for he himself was always turning back or aside in doubt of the way. But he could assist everyone who came in contact with him to aspire, with all sorts of sick agitations, towards the elusive truth, towards right feeling and living.

Whether a painful moral wild-goose chase is quite the best occupation for man is a question hardly relevant; it is certainly the worst for the artist, as may be seen also in the much higher tragedy of Coleridge. But Clough was not properly an artist, and for him, after all, it may have been worth while, since it resulted in his one satisfactory poem, the truly brave and unified poem of hope in the hour of apparent spiritual defeat. The only other short piece of his which is 'achieved to the measure of its intention' is a very different and

much more modest and much less well-known thing, the pleasantly musical and wistful piece supposed to be spoken by a peasant girl driving her cows home and thinking of her absent lover.

The one success among the longer pieces is 'The Bothie,' a miscellany in which we get much more than usual of the humanity and humour of the man, conveyed in what a generous mind, helped by a dull ear, will accept as hexameters. With an infusion of poetical feeling, it is not exactly poetry ; but it has plenty of variety, passages of a welcome vivacity, some good touches of characterization, and is very English. The stage of life with which it mainly deals, one dear to academic sentimentalists, is that of intellectual hobbledehoydom, which must mean much less to any considerable writer than childhood or maturity, but the subject is taken in the right temper.

What else there may be of Clough's worth noticing, in the 'Remains' and in the letters, I do not know. The poems suffice one reader, and even as regards them there is the doubt whether it would not have been better for Clough to have been only a legend and the loved friend lamented in 'Thyrsis.' Of the beauty of that elegy it is needless to write, but there is this to say, that never was there a figure less admissible to the gracious world of the pastoral elegy, and that too vivid a recollection of the actual Clough may diminish appreciation of the commemorative poem.

THOMAS ASHE

WRITING of W. J. Linton, I gave a half promise that one of these causeries would deal with another affectionately remembered writer: Thomas Ashe. Remembered, however, by few. Ashe's hold on the public was never firm, and it was relaxed well before his death about forty years ago. The contemporary of powerful and fascinating poets, he was always overshadowed, and as he neither went with nor against them he had no profit of their success or in the reaction against them. He was a shy creature, making a tentative gesture of appeal, in no way surprised by its failure, who retired with a wistful look into his solitude. The best of his poems were written to those who could not possibly understand his attitude towards them, very young girls, peasants chiefly; and a world then being given superb poetry of sacred and profane love had no patience with a love-making that was not love-making in any usual sense. He will never be promoted to a higher place than he occupies, but there will always be a reader here and there who feels the charm of his gentle personality.

His life was as vague as much of his work. A year or two as a curate, ended by his resignation from the Church, some periods of schoolmastering, some periods of aimless wandering about the Continent, an eventless final period in London in a poverty not extreme enough to be more than numbing: that is all

there is to record. He lived not in events and passions but in reverie. Early in his drift through life, for career it cannot be called, he had made for himself a peculiar ideal, which, I think, he must have communicated to Ernest Dowson and to Richard Middleton. The charm of girlhood that must vanish in the perfecting of it meant more to him probably than it has meant to any other poet. The seventeenth century was sensitive to that, Marvell having his lovely hymn to it, full of smiling and delicate extravagance, and Waller his fine courtier's complaint to 'Young Lady Lucy Sidney.' But there is a Latin sanity in both, as they turn all the weapons of gallantry to such innocent uses; Ashe has not their saving hardness, has no gallantry. He is quite seriously, in his diffident way, asking for the impossible, and he is not of those who are 'content to ask unlikely gifts in vain.'

The special charm of the very young girls to whom or about whom Ashe's best poems were written is in their unconsciousness of what he hopes from them: how, then, can they possibly satisfy his hope? He knows they cannot, knows himself defeated in advance and yet is ever renewing his quest. Once, in one of the most attractive things he ever wrote, he seemed to find a philosophy. The piece is about a village girl, desired and undesiring; and in protest against masculine selfishness—

Now we cannot like a thing
But we long to make it ours—

Ashe comes to the thought that the simple grace of Avice Ethel was not made for any one possessor, but for the disinterested delight of all who could appreciate it. But philosophies are for those who can think without constant reference to their personal desires, and what might have been salvation for another man was a useless discovery in passing for Ashe.

The value to poets of a philosophy, strictly such, is always being exaggerated by serious persons ; a mere convention will often suffice ; and it was a very sound artistic instinct that sent Ernest Dowson to the Latin convention in those poems which might be compared with Ashe's. Any convention would have helped Ashe ; lacking one, and not being a great master, he is always insecure. That poem about Avice Ethel remains in the memory as the expression of a human and poetical idea by a reverent and most amiable personality ; but if, instead of relying on memory, one reads it again, one is upest by the lapses.

Bless God that He gave it you

Past the cottages to go

is simply bad writing.

But we come to a test, which puts Ashe among poets and not among those who have by some accident occasionally achieved poetry. Not long ago there was in London an exhibition of Valentines, and among them there was one, by ' Sandford and Merton ' Day, of all men, with this miraculous opening :

If death would come then when delight

O'erwhelms the heart like wine !

It is a beginning comparable with Sedley's :

Love still has something of the sea
From whence his mother rose.

But Sedley, for all that his poem then goes to pieces, is a poet, and Day, who should have been called Night to distinguish him from the delicious Elizabethan author of 'The Parliament of Bees,' was a bore allowed by relenting God to achieve just two lines of poetry. Now Ashe is a writer whose best things seem natural, the worst seeming deplorable accidents.

The two cycles, to Marit and to Pansie, give us nearly all the best of him. His retelling of the story of Psyche is worth reading, as are all not incompetent versions of that legend. 'The Sorrows of Hypsipyle' is readable ; and it may be that 'Edith,' an experiment in something like English hexameters, can be read, though it did not occur to me to proceed with it when I met it some twenty years ago. But, on the most generous estimate, these long pieces are task work, done by a man with little power of organization. Ultimately, it is by a score of the short poems that Ashe matters. The least flawed, 'Meet We No Angels, Pansie?' is pretty well known through anthologies. There are finer things, with more flaws, in the pieces to Marit ; and the titles, with their reminiscences of the early French poets, are part of the charm. Outside these cycles, there is the poem into which Ashe put the secret of his life, 'Lost Eros,' and there is the touching poem, 'To Two Bereaved,' and there is 'Apologia,' rather like a certain piece by Mr. Robert Bridges.

Late in life Ashe underwent a certain change. Nothing much came out of his new pity for the people of London slums, but he gave us evidence of that respect for suffering without which charity is an insult. And London inspired one small new thing in which he definitely achieved to the measure of his intention :

As I went roaming
By street and square . . .

It is the kind of piece which records little more than the discovery of a rhythm exactly matched to the mood. It can be dismissed as slight, but in its degree it is a complete success, by a poet whose complete successes were very few.

CENSORSHIP

‘MR. MUDIE, the proprietor of the well-known circulating library in New Oxford Street, has inserted a notice in our advertising columns to the effect that he must be understood to reserve a power of selection in the purchase of books.’ So the *Saturday* wrote in 1860, and proceeded, courteously but firmly, to warn Mr. Mudie against the error of setting up as censor. A little earlier, it must be acknowledged, that paper had pressed quite other considerations on Mr. Mudie. His library had then inadvertently circulated a work containing a serious and indecent libel on the reigning King of Holland, and the *Saturday* had warned him of

the danger of lending his reputable name to such matter. But in 1860 the issue was very different. There had been complaints that Mr. Mudie was stingy in supply of copies of the Bishop of Oxford's 'Addresses,' of Mill's 'Liberty,' of some of the novels of Charles Reade, of an anti-Evangelical novel called 'Miriam May,' and so forth. He had defended himself, asserting that in regard to most of these books he had been influenced by none but the ordinary commercial considerations. Books in general demand he stocked as a matter of course, and in numbers calculated to meet the demand; books wanted by very few subscribers he stocked either in very small numbers or not at all. And the *Saturday* was satisfied till Mr. Mudie by advertisement enunciated his general principle.

Then the paper protested, as any paper not governed by irrelevant notions of morality was bound to do. Unlike most of its contemporaries, it did not regard a circulating library as either a centre of pious teaching or a *maison tolérée*. It did not suppose the proprietor of such a library to be charged by God with the moral improvement of the nation; and, on the other hand, it did not suppose him to be licensed to pander to the basest appetites of the public. It not only allowed, it urged that a circulating library should exclude 'the lower forms of immorality,' 'lower' being the significant word. It would not have him deal in books which only exceptionally degraded persons would desire. But what the average person demanded, that the circulating library should be willing to provide.

Yes, even including books of which this paper had fallen foul but which, it said, other judges or the man in the street had approved.

Now the interest of these unhappy far-off things and battles long ago is that sixty years have taught nothing. The circulating libraries ban fewer books, but they appear to retain the right to ban books. The gentlemen who conduct moral campaigns in the popular Press, when 'stunting' is necessary and no better subject offers itself, chide the circulating libraries for not banning more books. The Home Secretary produces once more the dreary mid-Victorian rubbish about not risking the innocence of children, as if the reading of adult people could be limited to books suitable for children and young girls, and art constrained to the mere avoidance of offence. Look where one may, there is not the least sign of real progress.

Not the least sign, I say, despite the obvious fact that the kind of thing banned sixty years ago is pretty generally tolerated now. Then we were in the third standard, now we are in the fifth, but we are in the same school. The violation, in a novel, of a certain commandment sent the muddle-headed moralists into paroxysms then, and now it would not much upset them; but still they clamour for censorship, by the circulating libraries, or by some council of busybodies, or by the State. Where there has been development, and a lamentable one, is among the enemies of censorship. Among these, since the 'nineties, have come to exist persons who find a violation of moral law

admirable simply as such. They discover 'daring' where nothing is dared, and flowers of evil where there are none but waxwork blossoms produced to meet a convention at least as stupid as that of the moralists.

The truth is that there can never be a final and general decision on these matters. The question whether this or that subject is open to writers is always an open question. We can indeed indicate probabilities, such as the extreme probability that the subjects out of which Baudelaire made an heroic, ironical poetry will be disastrous to most who attempt to follow him. But we cannot definitely say that every writer may safely deal with such an immoral subject or that no writer possibly can. The attempt can be judged only in the result, and of the result, if the writer have any originality, not one person in a hundred will be capable of judging. All fine literature does infinitely more good than harm over a long period, but at the moment of its appearance a fine book may easily do more harm than good, through misunderstanding.

Well, if the matter be so difficult as that, and it is, where is the sense of calling on whoever now represents Mr. Mudie or whoever happens to be Home Secretary to bind and loosen writers? How shall any one man of business or any one politician or any committee judge? And if writers who offend against the moral notions of such persons are to be banned, what of writers who offend against the very different but perhaps not less sensitive morality of us others? The doctors tell us that men may die of an excess of sugar

as well as an excess of alcohol, and it is certain that minds can be debauched by sickly sentimentality and maudlin religion as well as by realism in the treatment of vice. It was said a good while ago that the function of vice was to keep virtue within bounds : who is to control the extravagances of our wallowers in virtue ? Are we to set up another censorship, which shall certify that the work in question does not contain more than the agreed percentage of active virtue, and may therefore be exhibited to adults as well as children ? If not, why not ? Once we begin establishing limits, on grounds extraneous to art, we must establish them in the interest of all parties, not in that of one faction alone. The censor's blue pencil must be applied to passages of inflammatory morality as well as to those which deal with immorality.

Or, at least, it might so be argued. But in all seriousness it is as necessary now as it was sixty years ago to get rid of muddled thinking and cant on this matter. And we have a new danger to guard against—that of analogy with the film. The cinema may very well need censorship, because its material can be apprehended directly. But the substance of literature exists only in the words of the author, can be apprehended only through his expression of it, so that everything depends not on the subject but on the mind of the man treating it.

MARY SHELLEY

MARY SHELLEY is among those writers who, supposed to be known to everyone, are in fact known, except by the title of a single book, to very few indeed. 'Frankenstein' is proverbial, but how many of those who cite it have given any thought to its author except in her capacity as Shelley's wife? My own respect for her dates from the time I became acquainted with her edition of Shelley, whose poetry, naturally enough, came to a boy thirty odd years ago in such later editions as W. M. Rossetti's, so that the value of her imperfect but inspired work on it was long hidden from him. Then, in desultory reading, I came on the 'Shelley Memorials,' edited by Lady Shelley, and designed to correct and supplement the incomplete and unsatisfactory life of the poet by Thomas Jefferson Hogg, but perhaps to be valued rather for what they tell us of Mrs. Shelley.

Leave out of account the great confessions, and there is little to set for natural pathos beside her record of what she felt, after Shelley's death, in talking to Byron. Leigh Hunt, she says, she had very often heard in conversation when Shelley was absent; other friends, Peacock among them, she thinks she could hear without being incessantly reminded of Shelley. But the voice of Byron! 'I have been accustomed, when hearing it, to listen and to speak little; another voice, not mine, ever replied—a voice whose strings are

broken. . . . [Byron's] voice—a peculiar one—is engraved on my memory with other sounds and objects from which it can never dissociate itself. . . . When [Byron] speaks and Shelley does not answer, it is as thunder without rain. . . . When in company with [Byron] I can never cease for a second to have Shelley in my heart and brain . . . until, if tears do not relieve me, the hysterical feeling, analogous to that which the murmur of the sea gives me, presses painfully upon me.'

Mary Shelley seems the more admirable the more one thinks of her preposterous upbringing. Her mother she had lost almost immediately after her birth ; her father, fond enough of her, was an absurd and rather despicable doctrinaire with a frigid manner ; and Mrs. Clairmont, soon brought on the scene, was an ill-balanced, rather vulgar person, with that third-rate cleverness which effectually prevents its possessor from even guessing that there is anything beyond what it immediately discovers in a person. As for education, Godwin said sublimely that he had not leisure enough 'to reduce modern theories of education to practice.' But by fifteen she had an extraordinary amount of miscellaneous reading, and was giving evidence of much independence of thought. She was, if I remember, just about seventeen when she met Shelley, and in less than three months she had left England with him. The rest, till Shelley's death, is a story told and retold in minute detail.

Of what she wrote in the studious years with

Shelley's influence strong on her, and indeed of all her work, 'Frankenstein' is much the most considerable achievement. 'The Last Man,' which annoyed Sir Timothy Shelley by nothing worse than its title, and caused her allowance to be temporarily stopped, is looked at by Shelley students for the portrait of Shelley, there called Adrian, and 'Lodore' because it is an autobiography with a portrait of Harriet and a sketch of Emilia Viviani. There is said to be some merit in at least the Italian chapters of her 'Rambles,' but I know nothing of the book. Trelawney's spirited autobiography presumably owes something to her editorial labours on the great old pirate's style, and she wrote him an appropriate letter in declining to marry him—'You belong to womenkind in general, and Mary Shelley will never be yours.' Of hack-work, done in her gallant and successful effort to give Shelley's son a good education, it is needless to speak. There remains the edition of Shelley, long delayed by family opposition, done at last unequally, but with certain notes which can never be overvalued.

In early years Mary worshipped the memory, or, rather, the reputation, of her mother, Mary Woolstonecraft Godwin; in later years she was plagued by those who wished her to emulate that mother. With her usual good sense, she declined. 'I am not a person of opinions.' She respected those who were persons of opinions, because her parents and Shelley had been. But for herself she would not join in agitations to advance the cause of women. 'Though many things

want great amendment, I can by no means go so far as my friends would have me.' Proud of being her mother's daughter, she was yet prouder of having been Shelley's wife ; but she would not play up to conventional expectations of either part.

Mrs. Shelley, it is to be feared, did not see herself as a representative woman, a leader of causes, a person with a mission. A great deal of her work was done simply because she had a son to bring up and a very stingy allowance from her father-in-law ; and it is not easy to dress her up for any part. But it was a very exceptional woman who understood Shelley. ' You have not understood my simplicity,' Verlaine musically lamented to his wife after adventures with Rimbaud and much squalid vagabondage. Shelley has his one cryptic complaint, but Mary had understood and stood much. There had been the invitation to Harriet to join Mary and himself, a proposal of almost inconceivable innocence and indecency. There had been the invitation to Emilia Viviani to prove to Mary that the division is not the diminution of love. In his own explanation, one is always in love with someone ; that is, if one is Shelley. He was an Ixion ; his aspiration, in his own words, was ' to nurse the image of unfelt caresses,' and go no further. But the innocence, for any woman with less intelligence in love than Mary, would have been the chief cause of exasperation.

She did not succeed in explaining Shelley to her generation, but after helping him to live so many of his poems she produced an edition of them that must

always have a peculiar value. Editing in the modern sense had not been invented then, and she left much for her successors to do. But there, in those too scanty notes, are some of the secrets of Shelley's ambition, and certain old-fashioned, feminine tricks of expression must not blind us to the importance of her fragmentary comments.

MARY COLERIDGE

THE recent death of a sister of Mary Coleridge has revived memories of Mary Coleridge herself. I say revived advisedly, though hoping I may be mistaken, for hers is a name no longer recurring in casual literary allusion. The volume into which her verse was eventually collected by Sir Henry Newbolt may still be selling quietly, and doubtless there are scores of devoted admirers surviving, but she does seem to have passed rather out of view. And yet Mary Coleridge was one of those poets who give us exact and living self-portraiture; and if that will not keep a writer in public recollection, what will?

But perhaps the portraiture was not generally noticed, the emphasis being put by many of her eulogists, as apparently by herself, on her merely fanciful work. In this lower kind, she did many remarkable things, and it is not to be denied that come upon singly they excite enthusiasm though in bulk the

effect is weakened. For Mary Coleridge, dealing with two sorts of mystery, seems to have cared little to distinguish between them. The arbitrarily mysterious, however, for all the effect it may make when used with her skill, is not a stimulant to true poetic wonder ; and for myself I confess to occasional impatience with the man from the East or the woman from the West who passes on some inexplicable errand through too many of her poems. Such vague personages seem to me to belong to the tribe of Mr. Rudyard Kipling's ' maidens nine and lords of the elder days.'

But when Mary Coleridge turned away from such creations of fancy to look within herself, she saw with such eyes as no woman has had since Emily Brontë. I do not for a moment suggest that she was the equal of Emily ; obviously she was altogether slighter. But she saw fearlessly, and what she saw was a very noble, proud, austere, sensitive and passionate nature, a nature at once impelled to bold expression and scrupulous in reticence. *Secretum meum mihi !* 'That instinct of certain elect natures, strengthened by a delicacy that was very English, now kept the poems enigmatical in a very different way. 'There was no longer any arbitrary mystery : there was only the refusal to utter more than the idea, the emotion.

Probably every writer has known at some moment the bitterness of making himself a motley to the view, and has longed at once to tell his secret and keep it. With Mary Coleridge, because she was so much an Englishwoman and a lady, and for the deeper reason

which prompted the mystic's cry, reticence was a necessity. She wrote of herself only when it was imperative to do so, and she was resolute not to place any reader in the position of eavesdropper.

All of us know what self-revelation has come to mean in the language of publishers' puffs. But there was a writer afraid of nothing, too pure of mind to understand prudery, and yet never giving herself away. She was no egotist. She could not at leisure and with complacency settle to the appreciation of herself. She gave us not the full-length, detailed, satisfied portrait, but a series of glimpses of herself in which we may see her in the crises of her inner life, without being made privy to the circumstances. And so we may know her to the core, and, as the world reckons knowledge, be utterly ignorant of her.

There have been in our time three poets who have mastered the art of self-portraiture: Mr. Robert Bridges, Mr. A. E. Housman, Mary Coleridge. The finest part of the poetry of Mr. Bridges consists of lyrics that seem, and sometimes are, as impersonal as a piece in an Elizabethan song-book, but gradually, out of familiarity with his work, we come to knowledge of a character very definite. He has never been concerned to flash it upon us; he is so much of a poet that he has not the least hesitation in coming before us without the trappings of romance; and in his shy pride he is sure that it is unnecessary for him to sign his work. But it is a character, not moods, that he has put into his poetry. And, with more pungency and

a sharper edge of irony, it is a character that Mr. Housman has given us.

Mary Coleridge had not the learned lyrical art of the one or the peculiar concentration of the other, but she is to be named with them. There was no need for her to tell the tale of whatever experiences had been hers for us to feel her personality implicated in her verse : a snatch of song brought us the essence of an experience that could have been no other poet's. And out of those minute poems, which keep so much from us, which are sometimes hardly more than exclamations, which are now and then admissions of inability to measure joy or pain, there rises up that portrait of an Englishwoman which may well add something to one's pride in being of her race.

Overpraise is the poorest service a critic can render a writer, and I am far from trying to persuade any reader, or myself, that Mary Coleridge was a great poet. But in this art she had few rivals. To conciliate the hostile or incredulous let large subtractions be made. Let it be allowed that a succession of the finest miniatures are not equivalent to a Velazquez, and that a really great genius for poetry would have enabled a woman of Mary Coleridge's nature to relate all those glimpses of herself in a single work, done with an illumination as impartial as the sun's. To care for the crises only, instead of being equably interested in one's whole life, is doubtless to be less than the supreme painters of themselves. But, when all is said, I find myself wondering where in English poetry, for all the greater

achievements of Emily Brontë and Christina Rossetti, we may look for such a likeness of an Englishwoman as we have in the verse of Mary Coleridge.

I have protested against what seems neglect of Mary Coleridge; but she herself never sought fame, publishing pseudonymously lest she should bring discredit on her illustrious ancestor. 'Some in a child would live, some in a book,' she wrote, in a poem at once proud and modest, praying that of her there might remain to posterity only some sign the soul gave 'ere it forsook the form of life to live eternally.' That phrase, 'the form of life,' is as fine as Coventry Patmore's phrase about Mary Coleridge's divine namesake undergoing 'the ceremony of death.' Death or neglect, if indeed there be neglect, are powerless over such a spirit as Mary Coleridge's, those signs her soul gave remain, and if any neglect them now, they will but rediscover them with a profounder emotion hereafter.

Æ.

THERE are reputations that grow quietly, without haste or pause, so that in retrospect one can hardly say when they were perfected. Certainly a glance through the files for the relevant years has not helped me to answer the question when Æ. was generally recognized as one of the choicest spirits of the age and the most sanely

universal man we have had since William Morris. But what do dates matter ?

With Æ., I think, they matter less than with any other writer of our time, because his achievement has been, not the production of particular books, or the doing of immeasurable practical good to his country, but the revelation of a noble way of life. It is foolish as well as cowardly to cry out upon the modern world, which has brought its own opportunities to all the arts and chiefly to the art of literature, but there seems to be something of a maimed man's specialization about most modern artists. Deprived of place in the life of their people, even as a rule of influence on any art but their own, they have developed extraordinary faculties, rather as a blind man develops hearing and touch ; but for the rest they have suffered a kind of atrophy.

I do not mean that they have not 'lived' in the contemptible sense in which many female novelists have made their men of hypothetical genius live. Emily Brontë, in her ignorance of the accidents of love, knew incomparably more of its essence than any 'What-was-my-last-husband's name?' star of the films. Nor do I subscribe to that heresy of James Thomson's which Mr. Rudyard Kipling has liked to quote, to the effect that art is but a substitute for life. What I mean is that the modern artist, whatever his particular art, is rather like an engine condemned to have only one point of contact with the social machinery, and racing whenever that cog is not allowed it. But art is not the specific gift of an isolated virtuoso.

It is always news of a reality which it concerns all men to have and which can be had in no other way. In driving the artist in on the narrowest possible conception of himself we lose through his loss.

Now Æ. is of those few modern artists who have declined to be driven in, and because there has been no violence in his refusal he has not upset himself in his utterance. It is to be gathered from one of his poems, a very sensible as well as a beautiful objection to caterwauling about Ireland's political past instead of working for her future, that he has annoyed some of his countrymen, but it is exceedingly difficult to understand how any man can truly be wroth with this disarming personality. For myself, at any rate, I can say that, though I shiver the moment a writer invokes the wisdom of the East, and discover urgent business elsewhere at the utterance of the mystic syllable, Om, I am meekness itself when Æ., who has so much wisdom of his own, mistakenly condescends to Rig-Vedas and rigmarole. If he versified Theosophy, I should still endure an hour and see injustice done to his own genius.

But when I said no man could be truly incensed against him I said 'man' advisedly. For women, indeed, are entitled to nurse a grievance against a poet who hymns the manifestation of Beauty in them rather than their beauty. I recall Gérard de Nerval explaining to his little actress that in her he loved the first love of his earthly existence and all those adored by him in ante-natal life, notably the Queen of Sheba, and poor

Jenny Colon's most human cry, 'But then you don't love *me*,' and her collapse into the comforting arms of the '*jeune premier ridé*.' Æ. is not less provoking when he writes :

I shall not on your beauty rest,
But beauty's self in you ;

and again:

Away ! the great life calls ; I leave
For Beauty, Beauty's rarest flower ;
For Truth, the lips that ne'er deceive ;
For Love, I leave Love's haunted bower ;

and, with most trying transcendentalism, yet again :

Beauty, as thy heart o'erflows
In tender yielding unto me,
A vast desire awakes and grows
Unto forgetfulness of thee.

I would give something for feminine songs in retort on the poet who reduces the actual woman to a mere repository of Platonic perfections !

Yet, after all, humour aiding, women also must be reconciled to this poet, for does he not, like them, get nearer to the core of life than man, with his tendency to reason himself away from his instincts, usually gets ? He is as practical as a woman. It is one of the marks of the genuine mystic, as may be seen from the lives of St. Catherine of Siena, the two great Spanish mystics, William Blake, and how many others. For the man or woman, especially the woman, with a real vision there is no confusion of boundaries between the things of this world and the things of the other, and the consciousness of a pattern that embraces both does but

enhance willingness to discharge the duties of this world. It is not odd that Æ. should be a highly capable agricultural organizer and one of the only two men in Ireland who have never lost their heads over any of the innumerable political agitations of the time : it would be odd were it otherwise.

The man has been more secure than the artist. But what is fallible in the artist matters curiously little. An occasional hesitation in utterance, an occasional makeshift rhyme, an alternation of ' thou ' and ' you ' unmatched in any good writer except Hazlitt, too ready a recourse to certain favourite words : these things count for next to nothing against him. He has written the most purely and naturally spiritual poetry of our age ; yes, but he has done something rarer and greater : he has written it without a crippling specialization. He, I repeat, and in more difficult circumstances, has been more sanely universal than anyone since Morris. It is as something lived that his poetry comes to us ; it is as something quite natural for a poet that we see his practical work for his country. Alone of living writers, he is one in whom the dream and the business are reconciled.

IBSEN

FORGETTING old unhappy things and battles long ago, and trying to express what Ibsen means to me to-day, I find myself in a difficulty. All great masters make on

one the impression of opulence undrawn upon, or drawn upon casually. But Ibsen, in what seems the most characteristic part of his work, impresses one as carefully, fanatically, rather meanly making the most of himself. Of his greatness there can be no question, but it strikes me as the greatness of a man who has scraped and contrived, found uses for what others thought not worth the using, pieced torn things together, rather than created imperially as Shakespeare and Balzac create. There are fortunes made out of rags and bones and candle-ends ; and there are moments when Ibsen seems to be the man whose wealth came out of the literary equivalents of such things, and only just sufficed him for his purposes.

I say that out of an impulse, recurrent indeed, but still no more than an impulse. No one not a complete fool would think that the final truth about so great a writer. But it is part of the truth, and at this time of day there is no reason why it should not be uttered. It should be qualified by admission that in part the effect may be due to the unloveliness of the man's world and in part to the literary character of his chief translator. The first half of the admission does not help Ibsen much. When Ruskin said that the characters in some novel of George Eliot's were the sweepings of a Pentonville omnibus he was, whether rightly or wrongly, criticizing the novelist rather than a section of London's population. Shakespeare or Balzac would have found more in them than George Eliot did. And in that northern society of Ibsen's, superficially less

attractive than a club of sanitary inspectors, there may, indeed must, have been graces and endearing weaknesses which he could not or would not notice.

At the day of judgment it may very well be the defence of poor humanity and the discomfiture of the angels that the most of our vices have an element or aspect that is amiable. Many of them, in their finest practitioners, have a real distinction, and set a standard of style for the virtues. (Has anyone, I ask in parenthesis, ever known a teetotaler teetotal as gracefully as some men exceed ?) But in Ibsen's world intellect and stupidity, virtue and vice, aspiration and apathy, are alike parochial. What is not parochial is the mind which takes that world for its material. Its profound irony alone would save it triumphantly from any such condemnation.

Not that I subscribe to the judgment according to which Ibsen is the master ironist of the modern world. That position, it seems to me, belongs to Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, not because in one play, the 'Revolt,' he partly anticipated Ibsen, nor on account of his Symbolist drama, which cannot come into the argument, but because his irony is exercised, in his prophetic romances, from the standpoint of the poet. Ibsen was the prose dramatist as no one before him had ever been.

Assuredly, it is not because he wrote most of his typical dramas in prose ; it is because his aim was that of the man who understands the special capacity of prose and uses the instrument for all it is worth. With

so much good criticism written now, there remains oddly an absence of that fundamental criticism which enquires whether a prose writer is thoroughly utilizing his opportunities. When we have that, Ibsen will have a cubit added to his stature. How far he is making a virtue of necessity we need not stop to ask : the point is that he does make a virtue of it. The 'stationing' power of prose, its ability to fix a character or event in the precise circumstances, with every detail telling fully, has probably never been used in drama so effectively ; certainly not before him.

Prose has its limitations, especially when translated by the courageous, intelligent, stiff William Archer ; but translator's peculiarities apart, Ibsen pays the price of using prose, in the special sense in which he uses it. There is at least one play of his in which he gets off with little damage : ' Ghosts,' in which heredity takes the place of antique conceptions of fate. But the writer who chooses, or is obliged, to cling to a prosaic relation of causes and effects is writing with his left hand because his right lacks skill or is atrophied.

Still, what a left hand ! The way in which what is, at the moment of reading or hearing, trivial becomes charged with significance in the next Act ; the admirable remorselessness ; the faultless impartiality ; the cleanliness of mind which enables this man to touch pitch as often as he likes and have the cleaner hands for it : who can praise these enough ? Not I. And yet I remember Carlyle demanding angrily of the drama of his earlier day that it should show him something

‘musical and glorious.’ Is there much ‘musical and glorious’ in Ibsen?

Is there a really great character in Ibsen? How can there be when all his best work is social drama? Man is greatest not in his relation to a social system, but in that profounder life in which society counts for nothing—the life of Lear, Othello, Hamlet, the life of scores of beings in Balzac, but of no one in Ibsen. His defence is that he gets the utmost out of his method, and it is up to a point a valid defence; but that it has to be made tells against the highest claim for him.

ENIGMA

THE rediscovery of Donne was the last great event before the great war, in which Rupert Brooke, the most affected of the rediscoverers, lost his life.

In writing of Meredith, I said that he, Browning and Donne were the three great malcontents of English poetry. The reference then was only to their discontent with their art. But in dealing, however cursorily, with Donne it is impossible not to emphasize his discontent with life, with the life of the senses and the life of the spirit.

In the cases of others who have found religion after a youth of profligacy and scepticism, it is not difficult to follow the process and define the eventual position. We know, for a pertinent and roughly contemporary

example, just where George Herbert stood. He came to regard himself as a brand plucked from the burning, but he retained a vivid sense of the beauty of the flames, and could write :

I know the ways of Pleasure, the sweet strains,
The lullings and the relishes of it ;
The propositions of hot blood and brains ;
What mirth and music mean ; what love and wit
Have done these twenty hundred years and more.

Donne knew, with a more dreadful knowledge, ' the ways of pleasure,' but it is not with that serenity, almost piety towards experience, that he writes of them in retrospect :

Thou that wouldst not admit the beams of the sun upon thy skin, and yet admitted the spirit of lust . . . must be the food of worms. . . . But in the grave canst thou make these worms silk worms ?

Carnality is not transcended, and looked back upon with the saint's serenity and the artist's appreciation ; it survives, it is even intensified in those terrible sermons which depict, with shuddering and gloating, the final ignominy of the body.

Here is no case of a predestined saint for whom God is *Deus absconditus*, and who, in eventually finding Him, finds himself, and is at peace. Always he has been divided against himself, and he remains so to the end. Take him in his worldly period. He writes then a poetry of love as sexless as ' Epipsychidion,' and much more significantly so ; he writes, too, the most minutely truthful poetry of lust that we have in the language.

Odi et amo : but where is there a poem of love turned to hate comparable with :

When by thy scorn, O murderess, I am dead,
And that thou think'st thee free
From all solicitation from me,
Then shall my ghost come to thy bed,
And thee, feigned vestal, in worse arms shall see ?

It is this love poet who, with absolute sincerity, bids lovers ' forget the he and she,' and then, with the same sincerity, writes :

Whoever loves, if he do not propose
The right true end of love, he's one that goes
To sea for nothing but to make him sick.

But take him as Dean of St. Paul's and, less obviously but as truly, there is the contradiction. The religious poems sometimes, the sermons oftener, give us the like contrast. He would apprehend God by that violence which, we are told, the Kingdom of Heaven suffers, by stratagems comparable to those of the amorist, by an act of the imagination, by the exercise of medieval logic ; he glories in the incapacity of the human mind to grasp the infinite, and next moment would convey the Deity to his audience in a narrow epigram. He seems to believe in immortality chiefly for the edge such a belief gives to the corruption of what is not immortal.

His sermons are full of menace ; yet it is he who wrote that sentence which may be supposed to be richer in assurance of God's mercy than any ever uttered from a pulpit :

If some king of the earth have so large an extent of dominion, in north and south, as that he hath winter and summer together in his dominions, so large an extent, east and west, as that he hath day and night together in his dominions, much more hath God mercy and judgment together : He brought light out of darkness, not out of a lesser light ; He can bring thy summer out of winter, though thou have no spring : though in the ways of fortune or understanding, or conscience, thou have been benighted till now, wintered and frozen, clouded and eclipsed, damped and benumbed, smothered and stupefied till now,—now God comes to thee, not as in the dawning of the day, not as in the bud of the spring, but as the sun at noon to illustrate all shadows, as the sheaves in harvest to fill all penuries : all occasions invite His mercies, and all times are His seasons.

But we have hardly read again that sentence, which to me has long seemed in its kind the greatest sentence in the language, than we, or such of us as may be familiar with Donne's prose, remember the dreadful-ness of :

This is the *Anathema Maranatha*, accursed till the Lord come ; and when the Lord cometh, He cometh not to reverse, nor to alleviate, but to ratify and aggravate that curse.

An enigmatic personality, a poet incidentally, one of those to whom poetry was but an instrument, to be used and dropped as occasion arose. He is, sexually and spiritually, among the most passionate of our poets, and yet, if one considers him closely, one becomes aware of a certain contempt of passion, arising out of pride in his prose intellect. The prose power in him

alternately helps and hinders the poet, and in the profundity of his discontent he will not condescend to pretence of a reconciliation between two petty activities in a world in which everything clashes.

A very difficult writer, certainly ; made a little less difficult for us by Professor Grierson, now by Mr. Hayward. The formidable task of explaining Donne is not attempted by Mr. Hayward. Nor will it here be attempted by me. But there is one idea which I will put forward with diffidence. In unholy knowledge of love there is perhaps but one English poet to be ranked with Donne, and that poet is Coventry Patmore. Now Patmore was also a deeply religious man and poet. Due allowance being made for obvious enough differences, the cases seem comparable ; and I think we may usefully speculate on what would have happened to Donne if he had seized on the doctrine whereby every impulse was reconciled in Patmore.

And yet perhaps such speculation is vitiated by ignoring the wit, in the old sense, in Donne. With that faculty so tirelessly at work, could anything have brought him peace ? Could anything have prevented him from teasing his own thoughts, analyzing his emotions to excess ? Where Donne is concerned, one always ends with a question. Sir Edmund Gosse produced a very useful and suggestive pioneer work, and since then many scholars have studied the problem of Donne, but there is nothing like a final critical biography, and it is extremely unlikely that there ever will be. To note only one difficulty, how can we

expect a writer on him to be equally interested in his poetry and his theology, especially since that theology is more than a little medieval and to a modern mind often barely intelligible?

THE WILD-GOOSE CHASE

NOTHING is so much a 'back number' as last year's success. Look at 'Orlando'! Orlando has lived for some three hundred years, as man and woman, making on the whole good use of the social, and particularly of the literary, opportunities of that long life. She, for Orlando has persisted in being female since the reign of Queen Anne, has lived to this climax of the return of her husband, who has for some generations been stubbornly sailing round Cape Horn (no need for an absentee husband to double the Meredithian Cape Turk):

'Here! Shel, here!' she cried, baring her breast to the moon (which now showed bright), so that her pearls glowed like the eggs of some vast moon-spider. The aeroplane rushed out of the clouds and stood over her head. It hovered above her. Her pearls burnt like a phosphorescent flare in the darkness.

And as Shelmerdine, now grown a fine sea captain, hale, fresh-coloured, and alert, leapt to the ground, there sprang up over his head a single wild bird.

'It is the goose!' Orlando cried. 'The wild goose. . .'

And the twelfth stroke of midnight sounded; the twelfth

stroke of midnight, Thursday, the eleventh of October, Nineteen hundred and Twenty-Eight.

It *was* the wild goose, chased by Orlando for three centuries, by Mrs. Woolf through three hundred pages with spasmodic ingenuity. 'They sought it with thimbles, they sought it with care,' but the hunting of the Snark was trivial when compared with this.

For the wild goose (or else some other evasive thing) was the ultimate success in literature beside which Flaubert's was only a craftsman's ideal, and the strained aspiration of Mallarmé the chase of a domesticated, accessible gosling, and own Gerard Manley Hopkins's effort no more than putting salt on the tail of a bird that never gets beyond a slow waddle. 'Orlando,' then, is a fable of literature, having, among a great many other dimly descried morals, one to the effect that it is better to travel hopelessly (with the artist) than to arrive (with the kind of writer who does arrive). Very well. Mrs. Woolf has abundant fantasy, acute perceptions, a sense of beauty, virtuosity of style ; and we are ready to travel with her, without stupid complaints that we shall never get anywhere in particular, never sit down comfortably to enjoy, with sage and onion stuffing, a bird that, however, must have grown rather too sinewy with incessant flight.

The trouble is that Mrs. Woolf will not keep after the wild goose. The chase must begin somewhere, a little arbitrarily, and we do not mind a beginning in the Elizabethan period. Orlando must be born in a human habitation, and if Mrs. Woolf, out of compli-

ment to the friend to whom the book is dedicated, paints a recognizable picture of the vastest of historic English country houses there is no cause for protest. But Elizabeth goes to her head, and the great house also ; and, later, the Great Frost, when the Thames was frozen over ; and the Muscovite minx, who may be an anticipatory symbol of the spirit of Russian fiction, but who is undoubtedly a luscious morsel and would have pleased Gautier ; and the embassy to Constantinople, which has nothing to do with the matter in hand ; and Mr. Pope and Mr. Swift ; and Queen Victoria ; and Lord Palmerston, who satisfied himself that Orlando was a woman. . . .

Now and again we are pulled up with a jerk to be told that Orlando is still writing. The memory of a single glimpse of Shakespeare, whose likeness is given with three brilliant strokes, is periodically revived. Greene, who stays with Orlando in Elizabethan days, reappears near the end as the sleek critic Sir Nicholas Greene. But the book has not even that wild logic which governs fantasy. And of more than half the persons in it we can only ask what they signify in this context.

Some of the episodes are among the finest things Mrs. Woolf has done, and there are descriptive passages of extreme brilliance. Here, and not once or twice only, is that very rare thing, a virtuosity which does not get in the way of just expression, which does not hold us up, which is simply the exuberance of an artist who, doing the essential thing swiftly, has time

and energy to spare for emphasizing flourishes. The speed, of which the writer is delightedly conscious, is extraordinary. It is true that the style is not always purely lupine, being at times, one might say, Alsatian, or of still stranger mating. A sentence on page 36 is in the 'House of Pomegranates' manner of Wilde, and one on page 44 is in the manner of Mr. Belloc, and there are other echoes, but we pay little heed to them in the rush of sentences to express the racing ideas. 'The words went dashing and circling like wild hawks together among the belfries, and higher and higher, further and further, faster and faster they circled, till they crashed and fell in a shower of fragments to the ground; and she went in'—went into the garden of the Grand Panjandrum, probably.

The squandering of talents can be, as it is here, an exhilarating affair; but, leaving out of account the solemn consideration that it is not their proper use, it is too easy for a writer of Mrs. Woolf's temperament to justify the energy she brings to it. She has made two not very novel discoveries, that personality is alarmingly fluid and that absolute achievement in literature is impossible, and they are likely to be the undoing of her. The discontent they excite in her should operate in self-criticism: she makes it the motive of her book. But it is not with a wild-goose quill that the wild-goose chase can be described. It is the tragedy of one of the rarest and most strenuous intellects now at work that she persists in approaching fiction through a theory of fiction. But perhaps she

does no other than she can, and has the right to be accepted on her own terms. Yet, think of the school of novelists she is forming ! Mrs. Woolf we should perhaps allow ; but who without a shiver can contemplate the prospect of many Mowglis ?

PÈRE ET GOSSE

THERE is a sense in which the elder Gosse is impossible as a subject ; his son dealt with him in a book that is, within its limits, final. ‘ Father and Son ’ is the best piece of work Sir Edmund Gosse ever did. Acute as his purely literary criticism often was, he was much less a critic of literature than a student of literary personalities. By a further limitation, to do his finest work he needed personalities of the second or third rank, of a somewhat eccentric cast, and known to him in the flesh. Such a sitter as Swinburne was not altogether to his purpose. He could make a brilliant sketch of the singularities of the poet in his personal essay, but the full-length biography, with all its merits, confesses that the inner life of that strangely organized nature has escaped the biographer. It was with beings whose conduct and emotions could be more safely referred to a single principle or, in the old sense, a humour that Sir Edmund Gosse was most successful, and in his father he had the perfect subject, the supreme opportunity for the simultaneous or quickly alternating

indulgence of his reverence and of irony. That subject was too dear to him for the irony to be pampered, and too odd for any excess of piety, and it was treated when Sir Edmund's powers were at their height. What can possibly be added to such a book as he made out of it?

Perhaps only some trite moralizing. Yet I am moved to ask whether we quite appreciate what we have lost in the total disappearance of all pretext for the kind of spiritual conflict described in that book. From the literary point of view, it is a bad thing to be born free. The typical Victorian writer, though he could not have so exceptionally narrow-minded a father as Sir Edmund had, was born into a society which demanded of every human instinct a certificate of respectability; and if he achieved emancipation, it was only when he had in some sort earned it. The writer of to-day is born into a freedom which it is difficult to esteem highly, since it is for the most part the result of scepticism and indifference, and in being spared conflict he is also denied a valuable means of development. To live permanently with a sense of sin is, of course, a hideous way of living; but it is a deprivation never to have known the thrill with which, in a still earlier age, Leigh Hunt thought of himself as the boy who had once said, 'Damn.'

The elder Gosse was of those Victorians who spent great powers of mind in reconciling science with religion. So far as I have been able to make out, he fully accepted both the facts of scientific enquiry into

the age of the earth and the Biblical account of the earth's creation by a single act of the Divine will. The fossils were there, and so were the literally understood words of Holy Writ. The explanation in which they were reconciled was that the Almighty had inserted evidences of evolution into a catastrophically created earth in order to tempt Victorian men of science into infidelity. Resisting such temptations, it was the business of a man of science who was also a Plymouth Brother to continue his researches and his spiritual ministrations without any sense of self-contradiction.

Living a saintly life, he was quite devoid of regard for the sanctity of individuality. That his little son had a personality of his own, with the right to develop in accordance with it, was an idea beyond him. The son was dedicated to the direct service of God on the lines of the Plymouth Brotherhood. Sir Edmund, in mature retrospect, seems to have thought that he was the only Victorian man of letters so vowed to heaven, but an eminent critic once told me that he, too, when he showed a childish gift for verse, had his talents earmarked by his parents, and suffered terribly when later on he was driven by an irresistible artistic impulse to produce what seemed to his adored mother an insult to those vows. That a child's gifts are, after all, its own, and that the giver of gifts presumably intended them to be used after their kind : these were ideas to which pious Victorian parents were inhospitable.

It is easy to declare the Puritan utterly wrong, but more profitable to consider the extent to which he is

right. Given his premise, it seems to me that all else follows inevitably. The absurd creature is not the Puritan pure and simple, but that queer and almost exclusively British or American muddler who admits of distinctions and degrees, whereby some poetry is lawful and some sinful, dancing in the parish hall an innocent recreation and dancing elsewhere wicked, an exhibition of Turner's drawings quite edifying and a candid biography of Turner an outrage. All the arts are rooted in sensuality, and the thrill felt by the saintly Christina Rossetti in writing the most sensuous passages of 'The Convent Threshold' differs not at all, from any moral point of view, from that felt by her unsaintly brother in writing 'Nuptial Sleep.' At the very best, all art is a means of intensifying those instincts which the Puritan is pledged to eradicate.

The error of supposing the semi-Puritan nearer to any valuable truth than the unqualified Puritan is an excessively silly one. The semi-Puritan is merely a man who does not understand, or lacks the courage to apply, his own principles. Once admit that art, which is by its nature obedient to no laws but its own, can ever be lawful and you have forfeited the right to judge particular specimens of it by an intermittently invoked moral law. The Puritan can indeed be answered from totally different premises. He can be told that though art does not save souls, it makes them worth saving (worth damning also). He can be told that, if we are going to talk about design, there are clearer evidences of æsthetic than of moral design in the world. But to

agree with him up to a point, without going the whole way with the Puritan, is to write oneself down an ass.

It is well to know the whole of the enemy's case, to see his principles incarnated as they were in the elder Gosse ; and I think Sir Edmund Gosse was a better writer in consequence of his repressed childhood than he would have been if born in the purple of æstheticism and encouraged to produce patches of it. It is not really a tragedy that his boyish reading was so dreary ; his appetite was not cloyed, and he even had a small positive gain in familiarity with some writers whom no one would read for pleasure, but who are useful for understanding of a certain period. (I remember his appreciative word when I had happened to write something about the curious mortuary literature of the eighteenth century as essential to a just historical view of Gray's 'Elegy,' which was very far from being an isolated phenomenon.) But it was the necessity of being very much himself if he were not to be a mere instrument of grace that was helpful to the future writer. When one looks at the Dobells, the John Addington Symonds, one may well say, 'There, but for repression, goes many a fine talent.'

ROBERT BUCHANAN

To survive in a notorious libel : that has been the fate of Robert Buchanan. All his creative work has fallen into neglect, most of it into utter oblivion, but he seems secure of an unenviable eternity as the author of a single pseudonymous libel. Yet for close on thirty years he was somebody. He had his popular successes, and he had successes with at least a section of the elect, and almost to the last when he assailed his betters they or their accredited supporters thought him worth answering. More could be claimed for him. Of the organs of educated critical opinion which appeared throughout his career, there is hardly one which did not at some moment of pious aberration salute him as the spokesman of sanity or decency. He became lonelier as time went on, because it became evident that in important specific cases he had been profoundly mistaken as a critic and because it became equally evident that the promise, such as it was, of his youth would never be fulfilled ; but at many stages he was plainly the representative of the majority or of a large, solid minority. His work is thus a document which cannot be ignored by the historian of critical taste in Victorian England.

As a poet he had ambitions rather than ambition ; and when it was made clear that in no one direction had he done enough to satisfy the better judges, he consoled himself with the reflection that he ' might have been

sitting empty-stomached on Parnassus' if he had condescended to be a specialist. With his opportunism, his desire for immediate effect, he could not understand that the men he attacked were specialists not because they were narrowly limited or because they felt that they had found a paying line of poetical goods, but because they were strictly truthful each to his particular sense of the world. Buchanan wanted to write verse that would rival that of every contemporary, from Tennyson to G. R. Sims; he wanted to be in the anthologies and, even more, in the reciters; and up to a point he managed to get his way. The 'Ballad of Judas Iscariot,' which entered some anthologies, is not to be damned because it is a *pastiche*. Wilde's 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' owes as much to Hood's 'Eugene Aram,' and to some lines in Coleridge, and to Mr. A. E. Housman, whose book was sent him just before he began it, as Buchanan's piece owes to its obvious sources. But Wilde, not in the full sense a poet, made nearly all the borrowings tell tremendously, reminding us, with terrific dramatic effect, that the trapped creature was the amateur of beautiful things. In Buchanan's piece, which is merely a piece of writing, not something lived agonizingly, the borrowings are just borrowings. There are effective lines in the piece, as in some of his recitation pieces, but there is no genuine creative impulse.

And even as one of those who would do everyone else's work Buchanan comes very badly out of a comparison with a contemporary. Catulle Mendès really

could do whatever every French poet of his age did. To read him is like reading an anthology of French poetry, from Victor Hugo to Verlaine, in which an editor has just missed the very best examples of each poet. There is more than mere imitation ; the Hugo, for instance, being as good as much in the master, and leaving the reader with the feeling that only by accident has he come on nothing that matches the song of the lover maddened by the winds from Spain, or the 'Chasseur Noir,' or the serenade of all serenades. To compare Buchanan's slabby novels with the accomplished falsity of the stories of Mendès would be absurd. And then, for most damaging contrast, against the never more than shrewd, often vulgarly perverse, sometimes disgusting criticism of Buchanan there is that body of critical work by Mendès in which the fine intelligence is not more remarkable than the catholic and cordial generosity. The slanderer of great men is not to be brought into any comparison with the man eager to recognize every sort of merit and adept in gracious compliment.

Catulle Mendès, let us hope, answered to something permanent in the French literary character ; Buchanan, I fear, answered to something permanent in ours. In part, no doubt, Buchanan stood alone. That notorious pseudonymous article on 'the fleshly school of poetry' was to some extent inspired by malice, as Buchanan, in a letter to Browning which I have read but cannot precisely remember, more or less admitted. In other and unpublished correspondence which I have been

privileged to read for quite different purposes there is proof that years before the fleshly school article Buchanan had been incensed by the very wise action of Moxon (as represented by Payne) in taking away the editing of Keats from him in favour at first of a great poet, who did not carry it out, and then of W. M. Rossetti, who did. From about 1865 he was looking for opportunities for reprisal. But mere vindictiveness apart, Buchanan stood for that provincial and insolent attitude towards original work which, with moral or patriotic excuses, unpleasingly distinguished average English criticism during more than three-fourths of the nineteenth century.

We know that a man in many ways so excellent as Southey could develop a preposterous rancour towards writers who did not come to him with, so to speak, references from accepted moralists. It shocks us to find him boasting that he has affixed Byron to a gibbet whence no one will be able to take down the body of the miscreant: it hurts us much more to find him indulging in unintentionally blasphemous lamentations over Shelley, so immeasurably his superior not only in genius but in generosity, moral courage, delicacy of feeling. Buchanan, alas! is in the tradition.

His last attack was on Mr. Rudyard Kipling; and it appeared, if I remember rightly, in the periodical which published his assault on Rossetti. The old venom and (it is fair to acknowledge) the old vigour of phrase were there. But Mr. Kipling was by then established. Buchanan had forgotten two things: he had forgotten

that the best moment to hit a man is before he is quite up and that, as any actuary could have told him, he could not expect an opportunity of apologizing to Mr. Kipling as he had, in a vague and slimy dedication, to Rossetti. At the end of life he complained that, loving mankind, he had made all men his enemies. But when a writer libels every great contemporary what ground has he for complaint?

WHISTLER

It must be nearly thirty years since Mr. Max Beerbohm wrote what came near to being the final eulogy of Whistler as an artist in prose. It would, according to my memory of it, have been quite final but for insistence, with misleading effect, on the half-truth that Whistler as a writer of prose was an amateur. Max did not complain of that. Far from so doing, he said our loss in the transformation of the amateur into the expert would have been comparable with losing Walter Pater to find John Addington Symonds. It is on these points only, but on these emphatically, that I now make belated protest against an otherwise most admirable appreciation.

Whistler, in my view of him, was always and in everything an expert. Consider his work as painter, etcher, lithographer, and everywhere there is evident a very scrupulous regard for the particular medium,

for its special capacities and limitations. That is the very reverse of what marks the work of the amateur, who may be defined as a man with a general impulse towards art and inadequate science of the instrument. And, then, there will be found in Whistler's paintings and etchings an acute consciousness of his own limitations, inspiring the arrogance of his defence of them and his general parade of his personality. That, again, is not the mark of the amateur.

When Whistler wrote, he was very well aware that the pen is an instrument with its own capacities and limitations, and what he wrote was not a mere outburst from the studio of an irritated artist but a literary composition as scrupulous, exact and exclusive as his painting or etching. In the art to which the chief energies of his life were given he knew that he was incapable of rendering three-fourths of the world of the greatest painters, and he therefore carefully cultivated his natural tendency to ignore wholly what was not to his purpose. He did the same thing in life, with an effect of witty impudence, professing to be uninformed of the very existence of things and people offering him no opportunity for self-expression. He was the man who should have asked, 'What *are* Keats?' It is of him that there should be told the story about the Duke of Devonshire reading in a list of middle-class wedding gifts, 'napkin rings,' and conducting research into the mysteries of a social world in which napkins were used twice or even oftener.

Perhaps the most exclusive painter and etcher that

there has been, he was not less exclusive as a writer of prose. The one valid hostile criticism of him is that, legitimately choosing only to his purpose, he usually began by narrowing his purpose so extremely. In his controversies, certainly, he chose his enemies as a connoisseur ; and more than that, quarrelled only with what they had become in his transmutation of them. The Thames was not more simplified, spiritualized, made the exquisite ghost of itself, by him than the critics who had given him an opportunity. He did not, as they stupidly thought, flay them alive ; he made them apt subjects for immortal pictures of critics being flayed. He paid them the compliment of regarding them, in carefully selected aspects, as material for art.

And if he was so fastidious in selection of enemies and of what in them he would war against, he chose carefully among the weapons of attack available to him. He knew he was not the complete writer any more than he was the complete painter ; and he made for his controversies a style in which his every limitation, as in his paintings and etchings, should be a virtue, the thing not said being artfully made to appear a thing not worth saying in itself or not worth saying by such a master about such an opponent. Often most unfairly detaching single sentences from a critique, he managed to convey, partly by his trick of ' so on and so forth,' but sometimes in subtler ways, that the solitary indiscretion was not isolated but interminable, that every adverse critic abounded in his own nonsense and would be saying such things to the end of life, and in eternity.

At heart, Whistler was humble enough. The greater part of his argument is only that he is doing lawful things in a lawful way, though the claim is made with a strut and an insolent use of the monocle to discern the infinitesimal creatures who doubt its legitimacy. Almost always, too, there is that implicit compliment of painting the crucifixion of the offenders instead of just crucifying them, of deeming them worthy of his art as a writer of prose. But the man who stabs must not expect his victims to admire the beauty of the duelling weapon or the grace of his lunge or the discrimination with which he has chosen where they shall be wounded. His consolation must be that they look not only hurt but uncouth.

Whistler, with all deference to Max, was an expert in prose ; and, after genuflection, I must object to the Pater-Symonds comparison. Symonds was by no means a typical professional. He was a man of very remarkable, somewhat hectic personality, who was incessantly trying to find himself or forget himself in writing, and never quite managed to do either. As for Pater, the one thing common to him and Whistler was the anxiety of each not to be involved in any irrelevant interest, Pater refusing to read Mr. Kipling lest that 'strong writer' should get between him and his own next page just as Whistler elaborately declined to look at the whole world as painter or any but choice portions of his critics as controversialist. There are writers of English prose incomparably greater than Whistler : I will dare to say there is none more expert, at least in

delay, acceleration, professedly absent-minded twisting of the sword in the victim, surprise that the creature he has killed was a man and not a dummy set up by the British public.

It is very much a made style that he uses in that book on 'The Gentle Art of Making Enemies.' In part, it is a careful transfer into prose of his talk, with the most ingenious devices to suggest what evaporates when talk is reported. The raised eyebrows, the monocle, the expressive hands, are all in the prose, and there, too, are the pauses while a talker hesitates between wounding word and wounding word. The very typography helps. The science which Whistler brought to his writing, as to his painting and etching, was applied to every detail of book production, not least to the placing of the butterfly signature. An amateur! He was the cunningest of experts.

DISRAELI

THE oddest sort of hero-worship, the *Saturday* called the adoration of Disraeli, in a caustic article in 1863, admitting that it was on the increase. 'The Disraelites will soon outnumber the Israelites,' it predicted in protest against what seemed to it unreason. Well, they have outnumbered the Israelites. With the authoritative biography, and in the light of half-a-century of experience, the statesman has been established at least

on the level to which his adorers then promoted him, though not quite for their reasons ; and the novelist has had a revival, not only in the very handsome and appropriate edition issued by Mr. Davies. Interest in him has not been keener any time since his death than it is now. How curious that a man in whose genius there were so many flaws, in whose personality there was undoubtedly a streak of charlatanism, should so solidly survive, so gain in honour with the passing of the years ! For the existence in a great man of trickiness, flashiness, which may deceive dazzled contemporaries, but is exposed in time, ought to be very damaging in the long run. It has been damaging to Bulwer Lytton, who in their earlier years bore a rather close literary resemblance to Disraeli, and who certainly had something more than mere talent. But Disraeli, even as a writer, has left that rival dated in the bad sense, and emerged into a new life. How has he done it ?

Nothing is easier than to find in him sheer bad taste. It is not only that, like all dealers in epigram, he pretty often offers us paste as diamonds ; or that, in that over-decorated and too purposed style, he often seems to be all dressed up with too many places to go to, and becomes vulgar through lack of austerity and repose. For so brilliant a wit and so skilled a fashioner of phrases he is often astonishingly unaware of the comic value of words which he uses earnestly. Take an instance from the carefully considered and on the whole eloquent preface to one of his chief successes,

‘Lothair.’ In it he tells us, with every intention of impressiveness, that the Church of England rests ‘on the Church of Jerusalem, modified by the divine school of Galilee.’ Why that conjunction of words should be funny cannot be explained, but funny it is, and a man who can be betrayed into such things was not fully sensitive to the genius of the language he used. In most of his rhapsodies over the things that mattered greatly to him, the historical function of the Jewish race, the English Crown, the English aristocracy when alive to its duties, the English peasantry and factory workers under exploitation, there is amidst a really moving rhetoric some sentence in which the venerated thing is presented in tinsel.

And then look at what he saw in the various literary models he adopted in early days. He does Bolingbroke and Junius fairly well, but his exercises after Burke could only have been done by a man who had failed to discern the higher qualities of the original. ‘The Letters of Runnymede’ may have some hurtful phrases, but there are many more in which we can see nothing but common insolence. He was not, in any fine sense, a master of invective, though he became a great master of scornful and elaborately developed banter. (It was Bagehot who summed him up by saying that his grain was poor but his chaff exquisite.)

Add to this that his very real command of polished dialogue between politicians and insolent, young fashionables, in which there are almost Congrevian felicities, was accompanied by total inability to make

common people talk plausibly for a minute on end. Add also that as soon as he tried to draw an admirable young woman he became a vague sentimentalist, so that she comes to us limp and sickly with sweetness. Add again that the various ingredients of his novels, the political and romantic, are not well mixed together, except in 'Coningsby' and 'Sybil.' There does not seem much left to Disraeli's credit as a writer.

But there is quite enough. He is, first of all, the only English political novelist. That is not to be explained away by saying that he had immense political experience. The earth is cumbered with novels written by able men who have had ample experience of the life with which they deal ineffectually. The ability to use as an artist what one has experienced as a man is a special gift. Disraeli is a great political novelist, not because he had exceptional opportunities, but because he had the imagination which rendered vivid the tragedies and comedies of politics, because the workings of the political instinct were to him what the workings of the acquisitive instinct were to Balzac. No doubt, the ultimate verdict must be that he was occasionally the dupe of politics, that for all his wise and entertaining cynicism he took the political life at more than its worth ; but it is idle to quarrel with what was the condition of his unique success.

Then, as part of his distinction in the political novels, he was the first to fill in the whole political scene. When others have written of a political career, they have set

a few prominent figures in the foreground and lacked power to delineate the throngs with which the politician must work. But Disraeli is never better than in his sketches of the wire-pullers, the great persons to whom political life was a game, the little go-betweens, the parasites, the locally influential nonentities. For such work he has the supreme qualification, ardour for the great business with complete disillusionment about the petty means employed. And through all the rhetoric and satire, good and bad, there is the pulse of a genuine passion of patriotism.

Disraeli condescended overmuch. There used to be told a story of Mr. Justice Maule, then a barrister, being found by a judge at the club drinking porter at an early hour of the forenoon, and being rebuked, and answering, 'Well, I have to argue a case before a jury this afternoon, and I am trying to get my mind down to the necessary pitch.' Disraeli too often contrived to reduce himself to the level of his audience. But in the three main novels, and in that *Life of Lord George Bentinck* which has some of the qualities of a novel, and which shows a talent equal to Macaulay's for writing a particular kind of character-sketch, he used his special gifts brilliantly enough to silence all criticism. His very faults hardly matter there. The business of politics, after all, does demand the tricks of the platform, the limelight, the specious phrase, caricature, the big drum. What makes the three novels so wonderful is that we have in them a profoundly realistic basis and then over it a kind of alien romance,

Semitic, perhaps, or rather of the Arabian Nights. The romance is half humbug, but so in the circumstances it should be.

SAMUEL ROGERS

THERE are so many instances of great gifts rendered of no avail by misapplication that it is rather refreshing to consider the case of a modest talent so used, in a fortunate situation, as to win its possessor a definite, unquestionable place, in literary legend if not exactly in literature. Samuel Rogers, who died in the middle of the Victorian era, and whose very judiciously and independently selected collection of pictures was critically discussed by the Press on its public exhibition a few months later, was happy alike in the date of his birth and in the prolongation of his 'indefinite reprieve.' That must be granted. Born twenty years later, he would have found the high places of English poetry occupied, at least in the estimation of the best judges, by writers of a new order with whom he could not have competed. As it was, he got comfortably away with 'The Pleasures of Memory' before the fashion had changed, and, indeed, achieved fifteen editions before the emergence of any of the great Romantics. And, outliving every one of them, he had for the last twenty years of his life the interest of a survival. But, when all this has been admitted, there

is much which must be credited to his own taste, to the distinction of his personality.

That he wrote with care and published with caution may be held to have saved him from disaster, but hardly to have established his position. He was wise in withdrawing the first issue of the second part of his 'Italy': wiser still in reissuing it only when he had the illustrations by Turner and Stothard. But such manœuvres did not escape sarcastic attention. Some one said naughtily of the 'Italy' that 'it would have been dished but for the plates.' And his discontinuance of serious poetical production, wise as it was, might only have helped him to oblivion. What saved him, so far as he was saved as a poet, was his shrewd realization that his strength was in knowledge of worldly life and in a taste for art: the 'Human Life' volume testifies to the one, many passages of the 'Italy' to the other. It remains true, however, that the most nearly poetical thing he ever produced was in prose—a footnote to the 'Italy' telling in exquisite and moving phrases of those monks who looked at 'The Last Supper' as they sat at the refectory table and wondered whether they themselves or the painted figures were the realities.

As a poet Rogers has no definite achievement, only a vague reputation, respected by historians of literature rather than by readers of poetry, as a loyal, judicious and painstaking servant of the muses. But as the friend of poets he was incomparable. He composed their quarrels; he advanced their reputations; he

lavished on them a hospitality inspired by the nicest discrimination and the most sincere respect for their mystery ; he opened his purse to them with that delicacy to which Campbell bore memorable witness. (When somebody asked Campbell how he could secure himself against the bitter wit of Rogers, the answer was, ‘Borrow money of him, and he will never say a word against you—until you repay him.’) He honoured every kind of genius with a noble generosity, a total indifference to the world’s opinion, and without for a moment abandoning the right to admonish, to chide, to score off men of genius.

His own explanation of his spoken malice was that he had a weak voice and no one would have heeded his sayings if they had not been ill-natured. The true explanation probably was that he had an artist’s pleasure in fashioning the sting without being particularly anxious to direct it against the actual sufferer. There were, to be sure, times when he used wit as a weapon of reprisal. ‘Oh, Mr. Rogers,’ said Lady Somebody, ‘I hear you are always running me down.’ ‘Oh no, Lady Somebody ; I spend all my time defending you.’ And Moore, to whom he was most kind on many occasions, said that the fear of losing his friendship embittered the enjoyment of it. But in the main, so far as I can make out, his delight was in his dexterity rather than in the pain caused his victim.

In everything he was a connoisseur. His pictures, as the *Saturday* remarked in 1856, discussing them and not their owner, were chosen by a man at least a

generation ahead of his own. He was in some degree a Ruskinian before Ruskin, and was not without glimmerings of the truths that were hidden from almost all his countrymen till about 1870. He was, it is to be feared, even a little too advanced for that paper, since in the notice of his pictures I find no mention of the Giorgione knight in armour which enchants us in the National Gallery, and which of all the pictures collected by Rogers is the one that comes first to mind. But it is not on account of this flair for any particular excellence that Rogers is to be most praised. It is because, linking two centuries, he represented in everything the best taste of both that he is so worthy of admiration.

Whatever may be urged against the better sort of intelligent worldlings of the two ages to which Rogers belonged, they had a wholeness now almost altogether lost. The Grand Tour, the grand manner, the knowledge of pictures and books and wine, the leisure and finish of conversation taken as an art, the fastidious choice of means ; these are gone in our modern haste towards our ends. But (an old reflection) it is only the means of which we can make sure. If they be chosen coarsely for speed, and the ends yet not attained, what judgment can be passed on us but that we have suffered defeat in life ? That other was the wiser way. Rogers walked it all his long life, and to such purpose that though no one work of his really matters to us, he has his permanent place in the history of our culture.

Among his qualities was a happy disinclination to take things with undue seriousness. He was a banker

who made a joke of being robbed; a collector who remained the master instead of becoming the slave of his hobby; an assiduous cherisher of great men who could see, and be caustic about, and yet not be dismayed by their littlenesses. There was something of the excellent eighteenth-century hardness in him, with that century's feeling for the duties of a patron. He did not slop over in his ministrations to distressed genius or shriek on behalf of the causes he supported. Men of his kind do not directly inspire their age, but they provide an atmosphere in which artistic achievement can be related to social life, in which the poet and the painter can feel they are not in society merely as notorieties or curiosities. Rogers did much for his age in this way. He was a central figure, and the more useful because his own literary pretensions were moderate and his sympathies wider than those of an ardent creative mind can be. He was of those middling men who help others better than the great can.

PEACOCK

‘AMONG the ferment of novels which contain no new thing, and essays which are lame attempts at smartness, such writings as Peacock's have for long years been forgotten.’ So a Saturday Reviewer wrote in 1875, in noticing the collected edition of his works then issued with a preface by Lord Houghton. Peacock is of those

who 'dine at journey's end with Landor and with Donne,' and it is not in the least surprising that in 1875, a decade after his death, he was still waiting for his due. From people in general he will never have it. Learning, irony, epicureanism, Conservatism, these are things that set a man apart from his fellows : learning and irony obviously, epicureanism because it annoys both the ascetic and the gross, Conservatism because, when worthy of the name, it refers the craze of the hour and the idol of the moment to the standards established long ago. And in all these things Peacock was very much himself, highly individual in his scholarship, his mischief, his valuation of wine, his satire on progress. Not all even among his admirers have seen quite how strange a creature he was, or realized that his satire is frequently double or treble edged, being intentionally turned against himself even while it wounds the object of his contempt.

Mark Pattison said that an appreciation of Milton was the reward of culture, and it might be said that an appreciation of Balzac is the reward of experience. But, on the whole, it is not by their bearing towards the very greatest masters that people can be judged ; rather, by their bearing towards certain secondary writers. He who speaks fondly of Jane Austen or of Borrow tells an intelligent listener more than he could in an hour of intimate confession ; an admission of love for Peacock is even more revealing. That Shelley so admired Peacock is answer enough to Matthew Arnold's foolishness about Shelley ; it proves

that for all his dreaming about human perfectibility he could see the value to a certain sort of artist of human imperfectibility, and might himself, under favourable conditions, have attained to that piety and gratitude in which a man thanks God for fools. Shelley's admiration, however, was chiefly for the style, that consummate style which at first acquaintance may seem without colour and a trifle stiff. 'I know not how to praise sufficiently the lightness, chastity, and strength of the language of the whole' of 'Nightmare Abbey,' Shelley wrote, and all Peacock's prose has those three virtues. But there is more in Peacock than even Shelley saw.

Enough and too much has been written in praise of propriety of style; there is room for a book on happy inappropriateness of style. One astonishing instance of inappropriateness I have discussed already in these articles, pointing out how Oscar Wilde's 'Ballad of Reading Gaol' owes most of its effect to the application to a harsh, realistic matter of a style formed for the appreciation of beautiful exotic things, the style being in that poem a constant reminder that the being under torture is the pampered epicure and dandy of fortunate days. With Peacock, the success is in making the style at once an expressive medium for the lunacies it conveys and a comment on them. The madder the things said, the more precise, elegant and balanced is Peacock's prose. We are taken among people who have bees in their bonnets, whole bee-hives, but the bonnets are admirably shaped and worn with the nicest sense

of style. Everyone in that preposterous world of eccentrics is in some sort a stylist, a wit, a gentleman ; and folly, most cruelly exposed, still has its distinction ; and the lucidity of the arguments whereby untenable positions are defended is the subtlest criticism of them.

It was not by accident that Peacock, when he wrote nonsense in verse, achieved a kind of nobility in nonsense, in that absurd and delicious and glorious war-song. People go about praising comic rhymes, the best of them in compositions which can never be printed, because enormous difficulties have been overcome in them, an echo found for a word which seemed to have none. But the 'fatter' and 'latter,' the 'sweeter' and 'meeter,' of that little masterpiece are the supreme achievement. No one can tell us why they convulse the reader ; the thing is a piece of magic. The effects in the prose are naturally more capable of analysis. We can see easily enough why Squire Headlong's 'Push about the bottle' is the perfect comment on Mr. Escott's confession of his inability to keep in view 'that great fountain of theological and geological philosophy.' The bottle, the sacred bottle, is inestimably valuable in Peacock.

With George Meredith, who had the trick of the thing from Peacock, the witty parade of a knowledge of wine is no more than an effective digression. Essentially, it is not more valuable than some trick in Dickens. But in Peacock the bottle is a kind of comment on all things. It is the reconciler : Mr. Cypress, Mr. Larynx, Mr. Flosky, Scythrop, and the rest, unable to agree

about anything else, can at least agree that the fund for the regeneration of society should be devoted to the provision of dinners for discussion. The inscription, 'Hic Non Bibitur,' says one of Peacock's personages, is fit only for a tombstone. Wine is the inspiration of his finest pages. It is the symbol for his most mellow wisdom, the unloosener of his frankest laughter, the one thing certainly good, when it is good, in a doubtful world. There is the world governed by opinion and torn with dissension because no two men can honestly hold quite the same opinions, on anything except wine, and here is wine, about which they can agree. Peacock reconciles mankind in wine. It is in terms of wine that he should be praised : it is at the dinner table, with few at it, and at that happy stage when men recall the most memorable of their vinous experiences, that the eulogy of Peacock should be uttered. And indeed I am ending this utterly inadequate tribute to go out and honour him elsewhere. *Gwin o eur*—wine from gold ! Read what I have written, if you will be so patient. You would fare a little better in listening to what I shall say of him when, but I fear non-compliance, that order has been executed.

One writes like that in one's enthusiasm for Peacock, and doubtless, even if one has tact in doing it, it results in injustice to him. For he is not a writer to be praised publicly. His eulogy should be addressed only to those few who already relish him, initiates who will take rhapsody about him with sympathy and yet with a certain coolness. He is not one to be honoured by the

hasty raising of a glass to him. The wine is to be eyed ; it is to be gently rotated in the glass, and the bouquet of it taken at leisure ; and only then, with all the ritual, is it to be drunk to his honour.

RICHARD JEFFERIES

LITERATURE in general may or may not be a morbid secretion : it is certain that the specialized literature of Nature is. The greater part of it in English, and I suppose we have more good specialized writing about the countryside and the sea than any other people, has been produced by maladive men. As the aggressive virility of Henley was a cripple's, and the gallant vagabond philosophy of Stevenson (before he was absorbed by Samoan squabbles and the Shorter Catechism) came from an invalid's room, so the fresh air in Richard Jefferies was that of a man who could enjoy it only intermittently. It is not natural to be exclusively concerned with Nature. Reading those who have been, one is reminded of Wilde's brilliantly true comment on the Stevensonian planting of cacao, or whatever the horrid stuff was, in a world of kanakas, copra, beachcombers, atolls, and the rest : ' he thought he was living the natural life, but he was only extending the sphere of the artificial.'

Something of the same sort might be said of Richard Jefferies. At least, I suppose so on a modest and by

now rather rusty knowledge of his work. There is little to send one now to his writings, if one is not naturally drawn to them, but things were different thirty odd years ago. I remember a friendly and intelligent schoolmaster, horrified by my indiscriminate wallowings in post-Tennysonian poetry and pre-Restoration drama, leading me very firmly to Richard Jefferies, as much more wholesome than the 'violent delights' I affected, and there were other estimable persons of my recollection who used to take a volume of Jefferies along with them when they went out to see the countryside, rather in the spirit in which the conscientious Zola drove out in a phaeton to see rural France before writing his chief novel about it.

It was the period in which a poet was thought so much the more of if he correctly dated the appearance of wild flowers and accurately remembered the difference between the four-feathered Cornish titmouse and the lop-winged Sussex fly-snatcher. It was resolutely impressed on the weak minds of us of the younger generation that Tennyson was a great poet, not because he had that consummate art in harmonizing landscape with certain sick or richly languid moods, but because his observation of Nature was accurate. (We were not told that an excellent poet, old then but still kept out of his due, Lord De Tabley, had Tennyson beaten on that ground.) And, as regards Jefferies and others, we were told to regard that essentially morbid preoccupation with the open air as thoroughly wholesome. But youth is the age of rebellion, and to one boy it was a

relief to find purely conventional flowers and birds in William Morris and an oppressive indoor atmosphere in Rossetti. It is now that one feels at times an inclination towards the inverted decadents who have made a cult of the countryside.

Charles Lamb congratulated Clare on the 'quantity' of his observation; the quantity of observation in Richard Jefferies is immense. Since Holman Hunt tried to make a painted inventory of God's plenty, there has never been so careful a collection of visible facts simply as such. Open him at random and you come on something like this :

It is summer, and the wind-birds top the furze; the bright stonechat, velvet-black and red and white, sits on the highest spray of the gorse, as if he were painted there. He is always in the wind on the hill, from the hail of April to August's dry glow. All the mile-long slope of the hill under me is purple-clad with heath down to the tree-filled gorge where the green boughs seem to join the purple. The cornfields and the pastures of the plain—count them one by one till the hedges and squares close together and cannot be separated. The surface of the earth melts away as if the eyes insensibly shut and grew dreamy in gazing, as the soft clouds melt and lose their outline at the horizon. But dwelling there, the glance slowly finds and fills out something that interposes its existence between us and the further space. . . . It is the air-cloud adhering like a summer garment to the great downs by the sea.

There are hundreds of carefully truthful little pictures of field and wood in the writings of Richard Jefferies, and in certain moods it is very agreeable to be reminded of them. But to me, I confess, perhaps because I was

never a very thorough reader of him, and had not looked at anything of his for years till I took up some volumes of his the other day, he seems to be little more than a very able, patient, precise recorder. It was not an unreasonable demand of Mallarmé's that the writer should give us, 'not the dense intrinsic wood of the trees, but the silent thunder afloat in the leaves.' We, or at least some of us, want more than an exact transcript from Nature ; we want something of the mystery, of that which in a perhaps ordinary enough landscape will at one time soothe us with a sense of miraculously right ordering of objects, and at another arouse in us dimly that primitive fear to which the ancients gave the significant, now perverted, name panic.

Richard Jefferies was not without some experience of nympholepsy. He has an admirable passage, relating art and Nature, on the Stooping Venus of the Louvre :

The light and colour suspended in the summer atmosphere, as colour is in stained but translucent glass, were to me always on the point of becoming tangible in beautiful form. The hovering lines and shape never became sufficiently defined for me to know what form it could be, yet the colours and the light meant something which I was not able to fix.

But that is in an unwonted reverie before a work of art. For the most part, so far as I remember his work, he is content to record the results of an observation sympathetic indeed but not passionate, not truly imaginative. On a very superficial view, Clare seems to do

something of the same sort, but though he comes to his finest effects, as I have written elsewhere, in much the way children come to twelve times twelve, by repeating everything that comes before, the final effect with Clare is often of the most imaginative beauty, as in that lovely and affecting little picture of the snail, 'frail brother of the morn,' which ventures and draws back and 'fearful vision weaves.'

Clare brings us back to what is not quite healthy in an exclusive love of Nature. Northampton Asylum was the end of him, but even in his sane years he had nothing in common with the peasant, his nerves being quite other. It is in maladjustment of the nervous system that the literature of the open air begins, and in expectation of being hurried away out of the sunlight that men most carefully count up all the treasures of our common heritage. Jefferies had his own physical troubles, and no length of days, but not the power of turning his misfortune to any very significant account. But that is common enough in the history of literature. What an imaginative lust of the eyes there is in Cowper's prose exclamation that he visually drank the rivers as they flowed, and what an anti-climax is his poetry of Nature !

WILKIE COLLINS

WHEN, in 1860, the *Saturday* noticed 'The Woman in White,' it summed up the qualities of Wilkie Collins very fairly: 'Mr. Wilkie Collins is an admirable storyteller, though he is not a great novelist. His plots are framed with artistic ingenuity. . . . He does not attempt to paint character or passion. He is not in the least imaginative. He is not by any means a master of pathos. The fascination which he exercises consists in this—that he is a good constructor.' There is not very much to add to that, if we are thinking of him at his best.

But Wilkie Collins was not by any means always alive to the nature of his special gifts and limitations. At one period he developed a didacticism for which it was impossible to find excuse, at another he fell into sentimentality over that most tiresome of subjects, the woman of easy virtue and uneasy conscience who swims to salvation in a flood of cheap tears. Now didacticism is not necessarily fatal to a novel. Genuine moral fervour may be an inspiration. But Wilkie Collins had no profound moral emotion, no exceptional insight into social problems, and didacticism did but get in the way of his narrative. As for the New Magdalen business, the last word was said on it by a cordial and illustrious admirer of his talent when Swinburne sighed for the moment at which novel readers would see the last reformed harlot vanish into

space in the arms of the last clerical sceptic. The real Wilkie Collins was a dealer in plots, not a critic of life.

In the criticism of fiction, that difficult, thankless and so lightly undertaken business, it is almost the chief difficulty to decide how much value shall be allowed to the plot. We know that in the very greatest imaginative literature the plot exists not that the characters shall remain in it but that they shall in the end transcend it, becoming persons of that world to which the creations of Shakespeare and Balzac alike belong. Leave out Balzac, who, for all his air of being a realist, was drunk with vision and who gave all his characters an intensity of will that breaks through all the network of circumstance, and who is there among novelists capable of giving his persons an entirely independent life? Cervantes did it once. One may doubt whether a third name can be brought into the argument. But in all the greater novelists there is some approach to that kind of success. Their characters are not wholly entangled in the plot. With a little imaginative goodwill we can conceive of them as in another setting than that which the novelist has provided. And yet the liberation is incomplete.

The question arises whether, in nearly doing the higher thing, the novelist does not cause us a disappointment which, strictly as a novelist, he would be wiser to spare us. Asked for a list of the greatest novelists, I should produce pretty much the same list as the next man's, only passing by some of those Russians for whom life is a paralytic's project of

movement. But my list of the most *satisfactory* novelists would be a very different affair, with no very big name in it. Of English novelists, are not Jane Austen and Trollope the most satisfactory? And is either very great? And does not the novelist whose first concern is the plot often leave us more content than his better whose prime business is with character?

At his best, Wilkie Collins quietly sacrificed everything to his plot. Its development left little room for minute and vigorous characterization, and he was anxious for nothing more than a minimum of plausibility. One character he did invent brilliantly, Count Fosco, in 'The Woman in White.' The *Saturday* complained of that eccentric, ridiculous and terrifying creature that he remained to the end an enigma. That was true, but what else could he be in a book in which the writer has deliberately abandoned the novelist's omniscience and told his story through the mouths of several of its characters? We get now this person's view of him, now that person's, never his creator's.

This device was a favourite with Wilkie Collins, and though it involved some awkwardnesses and some strain on credulity, it was often used by him very effectively. For one thing, it robbed the reader of the feeling that the novelist was deliberately holding back information that would elucidate the mystery. Here the reader was given the necessarily limited information possessed by A, there the fragmentary knowledge possessed by B, and so on. The piecing together came later, and if it left something inexplicable in regard to

character and motive that was only what we should expect. Events were explained clearly enough, with an admirable ingenuity: human nature, in which Wilkie Collins did not deal very lavishly, was allowed to remain an enigma.

I have just been reading 'The Woman in White' again, and I have found it very difficult to pause in the reading. It has in generous measure the faults common with its author. There is, for one thing, that reliance on mental or moral or physical feebleness which disfigures so much of the work of Wilkie Collins. He knew that he could get startling effects by postulating insanity or incapacity in his characters; he either did not see or did not care that where the will does not operate or the character is helpless much of the significance of the experience evaporates. For another thing, there is an unscrupulous assumption that conduct will accord with social convention in the case of every person of moral worth.

Of certain minor tricks, some of them very irritating, it is unnecessary to say anything. The point is that, the book once taken up, it is almost impossible to put it down. A certain traveller of Wilkie Collins's generation, Dr. Wolff, when he was lecturing on his adventures, used to end by saying, 'And how it pleased Almighty God to deliver me from being roasted by those savages in the stomach of the ox into which they had sewn me up I will relate in my next lecture.' That trick of the serial writer Wilkie Collins had, in perfection. But there was much more than trickery in his

method of holding the reader's attention. He excited his readers not through any display of his own curiosity but by showing us the eager and frightened inquisitiveness of those through whom he told his tale.

VIE DE BOHÈME

THERE are skeletons in the cupboard of every literary critic: in his study there is to be observed a shelf, in the darkest corner, on which are books liked by him in defiance of his critical conscience. On how many such secluded shelves, in how many cupboards, is there a copy of 'Trilby'? The book was favoured of almost everybody some thirty years ago, and now, though maybe it still sells, never is it mentioned in print or talk. Why should it be? It was not even what so many in those remote days took it to be, in its unpretending way a first report on the topography and tribal usages of Bohemia. A great little man, an amiable and dishevelled classic, had sauntered through that country long before. To produce Murger is to extinguish Du Maurier, though not permanently. Let me say something of Murger, forthwith, that I may not mar eulogy of Du Maurier by dragging in his better at every other sentence thereafter.

All the sins of that delightful creature count for little against him in his best and best-known book, the 'Vie de Bohème.' It is sentimental, certainly, but with the

sentimentality proper to the subject and the period of life with which it deals, without that touch of senility, that infusion, too, of grown-up moralizing, which we find in Thackeray's Bohemian papers and verses. Undoubtedly the writing is at times slipshod, yet there are whole episodes, narrated as it were by a man taking his ease in the tavern, in which there is not a single false phrase. Recall that long story of the dying girl's muff! The impecunious young painters and scribblers who club together to get her the muff know that, far gone in consumption, she will not live to the time of year when she would need it: it is all only an effort to put heart into her. There is what so much greater a writer as Dickens spent his life in trying to achieve, and it is done without strain and parade. To bring tears to the eyes is not the finest kind of pathos, but of its sort the story of *Françine's* muff is a little masterpiece. And what silly gaiety in the jokes, how engaging a philosophy in all that hand-to-mouth way of life in the studios, what truth not to facts but at least to youth's sense of them! With all that, especially in the verse and in the treatment of *Musette*, 'muse of infidelity,' what a feeling (youth's, not middle-age's) for the evanescence of things!

Murger belonged to the golden age of Bohemia, Du Maurier only to the silver. There are those who deny that there ever was any age of Bohemia except the brazen, and it is likely enough. Impecuniosity and idleness are not necessarily picturesque; the fun of garrets and cheap eating-houses is easily exhausted;

and the foppery of rags is not a better thing than the foppery of the man of fashion. Also, to look into the darker places, the pleasing lilt of certain things in Béranger and Alfred de Musset may easily turn into some horrible prose equivalent of Villon's

Ordure aimons, l'ordure nous affuyt ;
Nous deffuyons honneur, il nous deffuyt ;
En ce bourdel où tenons nostre estat.

The merely naughty grisette with a tender heart must always have been rarer than Fat Madge's spiritual daughters, and the refining influences of debt on young men and of unchastity on models can easily be exaggerated. All the same, we must cling to the belief that there was a golden age of Bohemia, at least for the purposes of this article, for how else shall Du Maurier be put in his place ?

Does that sound as if I wished to write Du Maurier down ? Wishing to do the very opposite, I would invite readers to forget his French predecessor and superior, and ask themselves what there is in English to put beside the pleasant pages (there are others) of 'Trilby.' Of the major English novelists only Thackeray has had an instinct for Bohemia, of which, especially of its milder material pleasures, he wrote most admirably, but in that 'well, well, boys will be boys, and I myself as a young man' vein which sometimes exasperates one. He knew the country, and as the author of such things as the poem about bouillabaisse was one of its laureates, but mostly he will patronize it. It is that old trouble of the complete

English gentleman at his club, worldly wise and intolerably tolerant and afraid of committing himself to anything that might make him look an ass in the eyes of asses. Then there is Prowse, who wrote one perfect thing, 'The City of Prague,' in honour of Bohemia, and was some queer kind of sporting journalist under the pen-name of The Prophet Nicholas, and has never had the attention his careless talent deserved. Who else is there? Binstead, perhaps, but where there is no love of art and letters there is no Bohemia.

Du Maurier, then, is one of a very small number of writers who have given us the sensation of being agreeably wrecked on that sea-coast, without giving us too acute a sensation of being, like nearly all its inhabitants, on the rocks. I fear it must be allowed that he made too many concessions to his own and his public's dislike of unpleasant things. The book, I mean 'Trilby,' would have been better for a little more salt and pepper, which are not unpleasant, and patchouli, which is. But how agreeable it is to be with that amateur writer when he shows us into the studio! The faint falseness of it all would have been a defect if he had been writing from any but a very English point of view: it became a sort of merit because he had three Englishmen as heroes. For just so would Taffy and the Laird and Little Billee have comforted themselves after moral shocks, and Trilby would have been a very irresponsible person if she had not begun—how probably for a model!—to blush about sitting for the

all-together. Svengali is the merest bogey, and the latter part of the book is rather boresome. But with what a zest is the early part of it done !

There are certain books which, whatever may be thought of them eventually, introduce an unsophisticated young reader into a new and stimulating corner of the world. Well, 'Trilby,' in its small way, did some young readers thirty years ago a service distantly comparable with that done, so much more audaciously, by Mr. George Moore's 'Confessions of a Young Man.' Murger had done almost all that Du Maurier did, and better, but he was not read in England to any great extent ; Du Maurier was. And I write this largely to infuriate gentlemen with high brows who would kill themselves rather than condescend to acknowledge the smallest obligation to a writer like Du Maurier. Let them, however, be cheered up. William Morris admitted an obligation to—Charlotte Yonge !

‘ORION’ HORNE

RICHARD HENRY HORNE, or, as from about 1860 he chose to call himself, Richard Hengist Horne, is remembered for two things : the ironical issue of his epic at the price of a farthing, and his challenge to a great poet. As regards the latter, he had heard from the late Sir Edmund Gosse of Swinburne's prowess as a swimmer. Now, Swinburne was far from being a

strong or swift swimmer. Where he did surpass almost every contemporary was in his ability to float, hour after hour, on a rough sea. But Horne had got the idea into his head that Swinburne was a speedy swimmer, and with perfect solemnity he proposed that poet and poetaster should swim against each other, at the Royal Aquarium, for the benefit of some charity. Like Queen Victoria, Swinburne was 'not amused,' and the author of 'Orion' had no further communication with him.

Horne was taken seriously enough by many contemporaries, and even half a century later a distinguished editor of Elizabethan drama chose to bind up his drama about the 'Death of Marlowe' with an edition of Marlowe. Quite why he had his reputation is now a little difficult to understand. Who can explain it? Mr. Partridge, who seems to admit into the publications of the Scholartis Press little that is undeserving of revival, has just issued a reprint of 'Orion.' I am glad he has done this, for, whatever the worth of Horne's verse, he was undoubtedly a character. Consider his Australian record. He landed in that Dominion, almost without a penny, with the intention of digging gold. Presently he was in charge of the Victorian gold escort, in an era in which it was very liable to raids, and then Commissioner of Crown Lands, next Commissioner of Water Supply, finally Registrar of Mines. Incidentally (but God forbid that this should be reckoned to his credit) he was one of the three or four pioneers of grape-vine cultivation in

Australia—where there is much bush but not much good wine to dispense with it, and where since his day they have persuaded themselves that they can produce 'Burgundy.' The prophet of many things, since lamentably come true in flagons, with screw tops and a deserved rebate on return of empties, was denied honour in his adopted country, and Horne returned to England, and to a life for some years rather mysterious.

'Paints, too,' said Whistler, when they were enumerating the many accomplishments of Leighton: poetry seems almost incidental in the accomplishments of Horne, who had a cup presented to him for 'grace and agility in swimming when thrown over the side of a ship, bound hand and foot.' Yet there was some poetry in Horne. It was his misfortune that he belonged to an age in which the epic was thought possible. As things of that sort go, 'Orion' is not a bad pseudo-epic. 'The Death of Marlowe,' of which Leigh Hunt wildly said that it proved Horne to be Marlowe's 'genial collaborator,' has lines here and there not unworthy of its subject, and it was admired by Landor. There is some good drama, with some bad verse, in 'Gregory VII.,' which has an essay on tragedy deserving of attention from dramatic critics. 'Cosmo de' Medici,' which I must confess I have never read, was admired by Mrs. Browning and by Miss Mitford.

To hark back to 'Orion,' Edgar Allan Poe, at one moment Baudelairean in his insight, at the next the world's worst critic, said, "'Orion" will be admitted,

by every man of genius, to be one of the noblest poetical works of the age.' It is to be feared that such an opinion was not 'only his fun.' It is to be feared that other distinguished writers were almost as much astray in the later years of Horne's life. As Sir Edmund Gosse once said, Horne was a remarkable poet for seven or eight years, and a tiresome scribbler after that.

Just here I will venture on a gross indiscretion, for which no reader must demand authority. Horne owned certain papers (let us call them, for caution) and the late Mr. X was extremely anxious to get eventual possession of those papers. Said Mr. X to Horne: 'You give me those papers, and I will see to your posthumous fame.' Horne complied; in time Mr. X had the 'papers,' but he moved not a little finger to advance Horne's posthumous reputation. The story, never before put into print, is even uglier than it sounds, but Mr. X may have female relatives living (all censured persons have long-lived and irascible female relatives, as I learned when I wrote the truth about a certain great poet) and I refrain from details.

Orion, the central figure in Horne's epic, was intended 'to present a type of the struggle between the intellect and the senses, when powerful energies are equally balanced.' Orion, said Horne, 'is man standing naked before Heaven and Destiny.' All this vaguely alarmed some of the simpler of his readers. But Horne himself had the good sense to quote Hazlitt, who, noting that many people are afraid of the allegory, 'as if they thought it would bite them,' remarked that

if they did not meddle with the allegory, the allegory would not meddle with them. And indeed, as he claimed, the thing can be read without troubling about its inner meaning.

It had, as has been noted, an extravagant admirer in Poe. 'In all that regards the loftiest and holiest attributes of poetry, "Orion" has *never* been excelled.' That is nonsense. Mrs. Browning, though carried away by friendship, was much more reasonable when she praised his gift of 'malleting down metaphors into the groundwork' as Elizabethan and as productive of a powerful style. Mrs. Browning, indeed, was one of the best of his critics and much the best of his fellow-workers. Her part in 'The Spirit of the Age,' not known to have been very considerable till Horne made the revelation in 1877, included the admirable appreciation of Landor ('in marble indeed he seems to work, for there is an angularity in the workmanship, whether of prose or verse, which the very exquisiteness of the polish renders more conspicuous'), and some of her letters to Horne undoubtedly influenced his own opinions for the better. Her word 'metallic' for Macaulay's verse may serve as a sample of the good things she sent him.

Horne outlived most of his fame. In truth he was a man of the 'forties, interesting to the end by reason of his eccentricities and his physical strength, but of less and less account as a poet or dramatist. The old simple faith in epic and poetical drama, and generally in being too big for one's boots, was dead. Dobell and

Alexander Smith and 'Festus' Bailey and Sheridan Knowles and Westland Marston had all fallen more or less into disfavour. Sir Henry Taylor held his place, as in a fashion he long will, for he had stuff in him and no exaggeration. But there was really no place for Horne, even had he not lost instead of gaining in poetical power.

FITZGERALD

I WISH I could claim for the periodical in which these papers appear that it reviewed, and appreciatively, FitzGerald's 'Omar': I cannot, for in common with all its contemporaries it simply ignored the book, which, as all the world knows, was presently in Quaritch's twopenny box. Rossetti and his circle soon gave it a kind of 'secret fame'; Swinburne introduced it to George Meredith, and in the next hour or two dashed off certain stanzas of his own 'Laus Veneris,' in which with consummate art he has preserved the fitness of FitzGerald's form for weary meditation while rhyme-linking the stanzas by pairs so as to avoid the effect of isolated epigram. Round about 1862—I decline to look up dates for this table-talk—the thing was adored by perhaps a dozen of the elect; yet even in the Rossetti circle there were puzzled or recalcitrant people. Either in the masses of Rossettian-Swinburnian correspondence I have had occasion to peruse or somewhere else, there is a somewhat irritated protest

by William Bell Scott against the cult of 'Ram-Jam or some such person,' and it took about thirty years to make Omar Khayyam a familiar name.

When Omar, or, rather, FitzGerald, triumphed the cult became a good deal of a nuisance. For there were those, an intolerably industrious tribe, who would not content themselves with the consummate paraphrase by FitzGerald, but would pester us with disquisitions on the relation between the Persian and the English poem. It is nearly thirty years since a very young man who had the English by heart sought the opinion on this matter of those who had Persian, and himself compared literal translations with FitzGerald, and he would not be too confident now about the statistical results at which he then arrived with such assistance, but roughly they were these. Something like fifty of the English quatrains are close, though not literal, translations of the authentic Persian; about the same number are the product of more or less judicious compromise between readings found in one text and not in another; less than half a dozen are adaptations from verses found by FitzGerald in other Persian poets; and only four or five are (presumably) the outcome of FitzGerald's own musings on the vanity of life. In two or three instances FitzGerald has been misled by, or has with open eyes preferred, French mistranslation to the original. Once, according to the slightly Philistine Professor Cowell, in the magnificent 'Man's forgiveness give and take,' FitzGerald has been the victim of his imperfect knowledge of Persian, and has thus given to

Omar an attitude towards the Deity for which there is no justification.

When Abraham Lincoln was told that one of his Generals drank too much he expressed the hope that others of them would be supplied with the same liquor. If ignorance of a language can yield things comparable with 'Man's forgiveness give and take,' it is deplorable that Frere and Cary and Rossetti were not more ignorant of the languages from which they made their wonderful versions, that Lockhart knew whatever he did of Spanish, that Rogers had Greek and Lafcadio Hearn Japanese. For myself and in the company of my betters, I refuse to believe that FitzGerald blundered into such imaginative audacity. Assuredly he saw the opportunity and took it, knowing that what he was putting into Omar was truly Omarian.

The cult is no longer offensive. To be sure, there is still point in Andrew Lang's excellent beginning of an appreciation of Omar: 'Although much admired by the worst judges.' The worst judges, however, do not now pester us; as for the pundits, in Omar's own phrase, or FitzGerald's, 'their words are scattered and their mouths are stopped with dust.' The illustrators we still have with us, but their inadequacy is too obvious for any danger to be apprehended from that quarter. There is not one of them who has understood the enormous difficulty of illustrating any portion of that literature which includes Omar. Wine, the brevity of pleasure, the withering of the roses, the thought of that night from which there is no waking, the appeal to

Lesbia or Corinna or the Saki—that is material for no man who has not understood how many thoughts which lie too deep for tears there may be in the ecstasy of wanton versifying. They take Herrick at his face value, forgetting that Corinna is to rise and, in the marvellous phrase, put on her foliage because Herrick, in a passage worthy of Catullus, has foreseen the end of all that maying. If they illustrated Rochester, they would take him for a rascal with wit and a knack of verse, instead of the undeveloped great poet he was. And Omar is an excuse for an Oriental picturesqueness different from but no more significant than that which prevailed in Byron's day.

But really, on the whole, we need not sigh now over the fate of FitzGerald's sad, pungent, beautifully wrought paraphrase. One thing only need move one to gnashing of the teeth, and that is the multiplication of nasty, arty little volumes in soft pseudo-leather, in which we are offered Omar in the book departments of the stores. But if people will buy books from those who vend them in an environment of miscellaneous frippery, instead of from booksellers, why, their misfortunes command no sympathy.

And now for a few final words of serious criticism of FitzGerald's style in the version of Omar. Commonly it is supposed that he made that style in the effort to render the Persian, and certainly some of its peculiarities may be so explained, but there is far too close a resemblance between FitzGerald rendering Omar and FitzGerald rendering the poetry of European

writers for the theory to satisfy us. My own conviction is that so far as FitzGerald's style was neither strictly his own nor derived from the Persian, it was made on the model of Dryden's in that poet's versions. The technical influence of Dryden, despite the wretched text-books and the professors, is a thing very far-reaching, to be felt in works so different as 'Lamia' and 'Anactoria,' and I for one feel it in the moulding of many lines of FitzGerald. The darling of the late 'nineties, it must be remembered, had not only an admiration for Dryden but a liking for Crabbe, that Dryden (it should not have been Pope) 'in worsted stockings.' The unlikeness of the substance must not blind us to the likeness of the style in this instance any more than when, for such utterly alien purposes, Mr. Chesterton in 'The Ballad of the White Horse' uses the style of 'The Ballad of Reading Gaol.'

ANSTEY

It was the first principle of the Victorian humorist that his fun should be always at the expense of the unpopular side; it has remained the first principle of at least one considerable school of later comic writers. But laughter, as I believe, was intended to be the consolation of minorities, and of those who, though not outnumbered, are at some disadvantage. (I mean, obviously, laughter which is punitive, not that in which

all may share.) Thinking otherwise, the popular writer of one of the most successful of farces transported his moderns into the medieval world to make game of it, not of them, never so much as suspecting the possibility that the boot might be on the other leg, that the moderns might be shown as asses in that setting. Analogous things have been done innumerable times in stage farce and literary farce ; it was inevitable that a Victorian treating of the transportation of an adult into schoolboy life should obey the established principle.

But in fact it is rather difficult to find any grown man who, made to masquerade among boys, would not shine by contrast. Great claims may be made for boys as individuals, with a certain plausibility, but to little purpose, since the most of them are fully alive only in the herd-life, and in that they are not quite the kind of creatures to make the mature blush for themselves. Thackeray wasted himself in writing of adult snobs : had he studied the male young of the human species in its communal life, he would have found far more snobbery, and of a less intelligent sort. As for conventionality, the most slavish adult adorer of convention never got within measurable distance of the average young schoolboy's conduct ; and the fiercest and stupidest ostracism decreed by Mrs. Grundy never matched the cold-shouldering which the average group of schoolboys will inflict on any fellow who ventures to have a code, an idea, a taste of his own. And as for decency, dignity, grace, the right sort of mischief, any

casually taken litter of puppies could give points to the fourth form.

These things being so, despite the sentimentalists, Anstey took the wrong turning in 'Vice Versa.' His Mr. Bultitude, the father, was an objectionable enough person, but even he should have seemed a sort of happy warrior when set among the inmates of that deplorable academy. The more so because that institution answers to nothing of which the upper or middle class Englishman has knowledge, and except in specious gentility is far below the level of a Board school. But that is not the spirit in which Victorian humorists wrote, or write in the chief refuge of their successors. We must not quarrel with their premises; we must accept their joking on their own terms, unless we decide to reject it wholly; and I, for one, am not prepared to reject Anstey's 'Vice Versa,' or any of his works.

What has pleased me most in reperusing a book I have not read since I was an animal of fourteen or less is the literary touch in stuff that, for all its destined consumers cared, need not have had any. Many of the quotations prefixed to the chapters are admirable. There is a pleasantly sardonic application of Lord Campbell's letter of 1835, 'In England where boys go to boarding schools, if the holidays were not long there would be no opportunity for cultivating the domestic affections.' There is the adroit use of the Shakespearian, 'I beseech you let his lack of years be no impediment to let him lack a reverend estimation, for I never knew so young a body with so old a head.'

There is the consummate employment of Carlyle's, 'Accelerated by ignominious shovings—nay, as it is written, by smittings, twitchings, spurnings *à posteriori* not to be named.'

By such things, and there are many as good, we know that the author is of the elect, for all his condescension to the conventional point of view. Not by these things alone; for there are touches in the narrative itself impossible to be achieved by anyone who was not an artist. Also, when one yields to him, as one must, there are great gusts of laughter. But this famous book is not the measure of the man who wrote it. It was the same man who wrote the diabolically clever condensed versions of Ibsen, from the wrong point of view, certainly, for the laugh should have been against those who could not see that this very modern, very circumstantial, often seemingly parochial irony was essentially the irony of Sophocles, and that the whiskered Scandinavian, looking quite absurdly like that other great man, Frédéric, of the Tour d'Argent, inventor of *caneton à la presse*, as Ibsen of the less digestible 'Wild Duck,' was one of the acutest, most dispassionate observers that the human tragi-comedy has ever had.

All the same, the potted Ibsen plays were written by a man with a critical intelligence, and so were the 'Voces Populi.' Disguised, sometimes positively gagged, there was in the late Victorian writer for a mid-Victorian paper a voice that was not the voice of the populace. Given other conditions, he might have

‘spoken out.’ He did not ; but there were certain mocking inflections of the voice, certain pauses, for the intelligent. A man of letters who knew Whistler, and who was a good judge of conversation, once told me that some of the finest effects of Whistler’s talk came from his trick of adding ‘so on and so forth’ to the ineptitudes he invented for speeches by his enemies. There can be no question of comparing Whistler and Anstey, but undoubtedly there is a suggestion of ‘so on and so forth,’ of the inexhaustibility of human folly, in the finest work of Anstey when he has tapped the artesian spring of imbecility.

It is just there, and not in the mood of his contemporaries, that I salute this writer. At his very best, and that was late in his literary career, he did slyly open a window on the infinite, did show us the British citizen pinnacled, in an other than the poet’s sense, in the intense inane but contemplating other heights in other lives and even in this. To hint the inexhaustibility of idiocy and solemn nonsense, that was his mission, perhaps his unconscious mission. His fools were looking about like Alexander for new worlds to conquer ; they had the passion for invading the great unexplored spaces of the world to subjugate them with commonplaces. And, obeying all the little rules of the game as understood in his period, he could yet suggest that they would never cease from aspiration and effort, that stupidity would succeed stupidity, *ad infinitum*. He deserved another age. He deserved an ampler liberty alike in choice of subjects and in treatment of them.

MRS. STEEL

WITH the death of Mrs. Steel there goes from among us a writer who was for a few years in the 'nineties a novelist unsurpassed in her own department by any contemporary, and who, without decline of power, then became something other than a novelist. Looking back over criticisms of her in the *Saturday*, it is plain that her development was rather disconcerting, but I do not remember to have seen its nature defined. Let me say, then, it was that old error of those writers who are not pure artists, the error of supposing that the artist is concerned with any but the artistic value of his material.

Flora Annie Steel in her best years used her Indian experience and the results of her researches into the history of India simply as material for fiction, choosing and rejecting, subduing or making salient, the details with an eye to nothing but literary significance. As time went on, she became increasingly interested in Indian history, philosophy, religion, regarded from the point of view of the historian, the philosopher, the seeker after God. In the end, what she wrote were not novels or romances but composite works, of a certain utility to those desiring the illusion of contact with the Indian mind, but despite some good pages unsatisfactory as literature. She had come to this, that she confused the intrinsic with the acquired values, the

values of her facts separately considered in their own categories with the values they gained when brought together in the artist's pattern.

Babar, whose memoirs are among the most remarkable of self-portraits, is a very human and picturesque figure, and Akbar was one of the most enlightened sovereigns the world has known. Either might be made the hero of a great historical romance, by a writer not superior to Mrs. Steel but resolutely set on writing historical romance instead of 'doing justice' to the subject from half a dozen points of view, with a story thrown in as a concession to the public. It was an unlucky hour in which Mrs. Steel, instead of relying on her observation of Indian life, took to reading about it, in a spirit sometimes not far enough removed from that of the person who sits, in Occidental drawing-rooms, at the feet of some vague representative of Oriental wisdom.

Within its limits, her knowledge of Indian life was incomparable. And when I say there were limits I am not implying that anyone has had deeper knowledge of Indian life over a wider area. To ask a writer to know India as a whole is to require of him something analogous not only to knowing all Europe but to knowing it in every stage of social evolution from the tenth century to the twentieth. There are several hundred Indias, and it is much if a writer have even a superficial knowledge of a percentage of them. Mrs. Steel, with the advantage of her sex in a country in which no man may have acquaintance with

the family life of the people, and working for the education of village children, knew the Punjab thoroughly.

There have been others, 'the first of those who know'; the Abbé Dubois in Southern India; Sir Alfred Lyall, administrator, student of Indian thought, poet of sorts; a group of Stracheys who between them filled every office, except the Viceroyalty, open to talent in that country; Crookes, whose genius was for folk-lore; Grierson, with a knowledge of Indian languages that would have qualified him to mock at the official interpreter at the Tower of Babel; Bain, dreaming himself into the world of Sanskrit fable. I take names as they come to mind, missing several of great celebrity, and deliberately I do not add the names which are known only locally or to specialists. A full list would be very lengthy. But it would contain the name of no imaginative writer more thoroughly seized of the life of a particular part of India than was Flora Annie Steel.

For her best novel, 'On the Face of the Waters,' that moving story of the Indian Mutiny, she prepared elaborately. Not content with all she already knew, she went back to India, fixed herself in an obscure town of the Punjab, collected every Indian memory of the catastrophe she could. Later, she studied the documentary evidence in the India Office with diligence. But let no one suppose that her second sojourn in India or her reading would have enabled almost any competent novelist to emulate her work. Only a fine

imagination could have recaptured the chaotic conditions of the period.

Whether by some lucky defect of which she was unconscious or with a deliberate intention, the better of her Indian novels all present a confusion, an overcrowded stage in which the individual seldom counts for much except for his or her moment. It is so that the novel of India ought to be written. Again, at her best she had the power to present the queer logic of the Indian peasantry and their aloofness from political or military events. Their memories are stored with calamities, and all against which they cannot strive tend to be classed together ; conquest or famine, revolt or restoration, plunder by freebooters or by the soldiers of an established authority, to all through the ages they have resigned themselves in the same way, caring little whence or by what agency calamity came, certain that it would not endure.

But between Mrs. Steel's instinctive understanding of the people of one part of India as she met them and her effort to get through deliberate study at the motives and ideals of the ancient makers of India there was all the difference in the world. She presumably prized her later work more than that of her early prime, but her readers judged otherwise and rightly. Not that even her best was faultless, for she tended to knit loosely and was even then reluctant to keep the superfluous out of her work. Nevertheless, the woman who wrote 'On the Face of the Waters' produced one of the most vivid, original and truthful historical novels we have

had in our time, and there were at least two other novels not much inferior to it.

But then Mrs. Steel took up with work having no relation to her art. She became involved in the movement for votes for women, and, whatever one may think of the particular question, such enthusiasms must be allowed to have weakened her writings. But she kept her vitality to the very last, and the American immigration authorities who held her up as a victim of senile decay were exposed to derision.

MAX

ALL men are agreed in praising Max, and the coincidence of a new fairy-tale and a new exhibition of caricatures has just set them repeating the things everyone has been saying of him for years. It seems superfluous to add a word to the concert of eulogy. But besides Max the world's possession there is Max the Saturday Reviewer of long ago, and I think people forget what manner of writer he was. When they tell one that he is a charming trifler, a dainty amateur of letters, and so forth, I am moved to ask whether it belongs to the character of a trifler to give twelve years to the labour of dramatic criticism and of an amateur to maintain his level throughout such a period.

For all those years Max was engaged in a crusade. Now, it is not very difficult for the prophet, the puritan,

the hearty iconoclast, the swashbuckler of journalism to keep up the fight for a decade or a lifetime. A man who goes into journalism in the spirit of, say, the late W. T. Stead, is buoyed up continuously by belief in his mission and unhampered by any intellectual scruples and untroubled by fear of being thought rowdy. The part of the fanatic, if nature has equipped one for it, is easy to play. What is difficult is zeal on behalf of moderation, passion for the amenities, tirelessness in demanding the repose which is the last reward of culture. And these were the merits, among others, of Max in the *Saturday*.

The trouble with reformers is that, in their concern for the end, they forget to keep the means worthy. Excellent, one says to them; thanks to your heroic efforts the world has been at long last rid of an abomination; but unfortunately the process has involved injury to some of the things which make it a world worth living in. The particular controversy has been closed, with the triumph of right, but all subsequent controversies will be a little more vulgar in consequence of the methods adopted in it. And that is a very serious consideration; for it is by controversy that we live. By all means let us have the Augean stables cleaned up, but not at the price of becoming a nation of scavengers.

The danger was perceived before Max by Matthew Arnold. Acutely aware of the ugly seriousness and provincial brutality of most controversy in England, he made for himself a prose manner which can be

defended by many arguments but which annoyed very many people favourable to his cause. Perhaps he was not really emancipated enough. That kid-gloved manner was put on by a man who, for all his exquisite culture and his genius as a poet, was the product of a very robust Philistinism—David, the son of Goliath. One was conscious of a certain incongruity. And indeed Arnold, with his most admirable general principles, could on occasion be very provincial in his judgments, as in the notorious nonsense about French poetry and about Shelley.

If Arnold was a dandy in controversy, it was largely in assumption of a manner. But Max was a dandy by birth. He really was a man of the world ; he really did observe the human, or rather the metropolitan, comedy with that nice blend of curiosity and indifference, and was not pretending to do so in order to irritate the over-serious. There was no more fear of his pose breaking down than there was of Hawtrey breaking down in a lie. It was a pose, but in no other attitude could Max confront what the London of his period offered him. There he was, perfectly dressed, in the stalls, politely ready for entertainment, incapable of being either carried away by the enthusiasm of the audience or provoked by its noisy dissent. Nothing could ruffle him. A gentleman does not enter on a controversy or end it with his collar crumpled and his tie under one ear, or howl down an opponent, or invoke the chucker-out.

Of course, there are things in life which cannot be

fully appreciated from the position Max consistently occupied. Even in that matter of dramatic criticism Max had evident limitations. The man who wrote the enchantingly lunatical letters to a friend in China and stammered out bad puns was also the author of the most fundamental criticism of some of the very greatest things in Elizabethan drama ; but Max is not Charles Lamb. The heights and depths are not to be surveyed by him. No one knows it better ; no one since Pater has been more careful to work only within his proper limits.

So working, he has given us a small quantity of literature which is almost without flaw. But I am not concerned here to estimate his whole achievement as a writer. All I wish to do is to remind people that this exquisite, this trifler, spent twelve years in the wearing grind of dramatic criticism, emerging from it without a trace of the conflict. From time to time during those years it was necessary for him to insult someone ; but you will search his articles in vain for the kind of thing a man blushes for afterwards. The voice never became shrill, the nice conduct of the cane was not forgotten even when it was applied to an adversary. That his dramatic criticism did a great deal of good is not my point ; rather would I dwell upon the fact that he enriched the art of dramatic, and other, criticism. For twelve years he was an incarnated proof that bricks can be made without straw, that bricks need not be dropped or thrown about, and that their production does not necessitate grime or a coarse industriousness.

There is no contemporary reputation built up on a smaller or a safer foundation. But in truth there has been no building up. One day in the 'nineties people became aware that very clever young Mr. Beerbohm was more than very clever, and said of course they had known as much all along. I suppose his public has grown, but so far as one can judge from one's own acquaintances, people are neither more nor less enthusiastic about him than they were twenty years ago. There has never been any wrangling about his merits. If there exist people who do not recognize them, they keep silent. He moves through the decades to the murmur of general approval. It would be quite wrong if at any stage there was an outburst of tumultuous applause, and horrid if he were discovered by some new public. Obscurity would never have suited him, nor limelight. A pleasantly subdued illumination is his due, and he has it. He has always, in his quiet way, managed to get his due; which is not the achievement of a trifle. He has done what very few but great writers do: he has secured precisely the kind of celebrity he desired.

TROLLOPE

TROLLOPE the novelist, it seems to me, is best approached through Trollope the man. At first glance, he seemed to many observers the typical product of English beef and beer and English fox-hunting and

English club-life. Burly, generously bearded, at once weighty and brisk of movement, loud-voiced, disputatious, choler and kindness contending in his usual expression, a resolute inelegant rider, a hearty trencher-man, a sound judge of wine : a squire with literary gifts. But, as Julian Hawthorne noted in a very valuable impression of him, Trollope was disputatious chiefly in the endeavour to establish accord between his fellows and himself. There was something pathetic about the big, genially overbearing man. He was the victim of what, in the jargon of to-day, would be called an inferiority complex. His wretched boyhood and trying first months as a civil servant had left him with the feeling of handicap, and when success came he was touchingly anxious to assert equality and identity or similarity of interests.

Trollope, indeed, was very well equipped for his work as a novelist by being very like the typical member of his class and very conscious of inner differences. He could write of them as one of themselves, and yet see them with a measure of detachment. And then, though for a good many years it did not seem so, he was fortunate in his Post Office work, which took him all over the country, and in the passion for hunting which he unexpectedly developed. He learned first Ireland and then England on horseback, as the Wesleys on their missions and Cobbett on his enquiries learned the country. He began to write fiction late enough for much of his material to have been assimilated, and very soon after the beginning

he was working in the right spirit. He was thirty-seven when he wrote his first characteristic book, 'The Warden,' against which it may be urged that it contains advocacy and of a sort foreign to Trollope's nature ; by forty he had shed everything that could get in the way of his progress as a novelist pure and simple. I have said that he worked in the right spirit ; since there is no one spirit in which the novelist is bound to work, I mean, of course, the right spirit for him. He was by his whole constitution of those who take life on its own terms, content with the drabness of most of it, patient with the trivialities, the incongruities, the disorderly sequence of events. It is amusing to conjecture what he would have made of the cry of Villiers de l'Isle-Adam—' As for living, our servants will do that for us ! '

In a great deal of great fiction there is implicit a judgment on average humanity. With the supreme novelist, with Balzac, the judgment is on the ungirt loins, the unlit lamp, the talent hidden in a napkin. He is wisely indifferent to the direction in which the energy of the will issues, but he demands that there shall be immense energy and in full exercise. As Baudelaire said, the very scullions in Balzac have genius ; that is, they have an extraordinary intensity of will to be themselves. With many novelists the judgment has been in some sort moral. Often, especially in English fiction, the novelist has throughout let it be seen that he has a finer morality or a better social code than his people. In Trollope's best work

we have nothing of all this. The actions of most of his people are governed by the average decent Englishman's ideas of decent conduct, to the extent that he saw those ideas respected about him. He records what he has observed and is content.

His tireless uncritical absorption in life communicates itself to his reader. These are not very wonderful people, and these are not very extraordinary events, and the medium in which they are conveyed to us is excellently serviceable, yet does not demand any special attention for itself. But here is life. Under many limitations, certainly, for Trollope is very much an Englishman and of his own period. But since he does not feel the limitations, neither do we. The story unrolls, often not quite so rapidly as we could wish, but so as to establish confidence in him. It will proceed evenly, and when all is over we shall have seen a panorama of upper or upper-middle class Victorian life more soberly truthful than any other man can give us. The sobriety will not have meant the exclusion of events that, nakedly considered, would be sensational ; but it is one of the merits of Trollope that he tones the exceptional to the normal, and what in another writer would be the peculiarly arresting thing becomes with him hardly more absorbing than some page in record of the humdrum. Things take their place in Trollope ; the strangest are subdued to the general level of life.

His admirers have disputed which is his best book. Perhaps it is 'Doctor Thorne,' which in Mary Thorne has his finest, his most charming heroine, and a very

good plot, and abundance of his shrewdest characterization, and which is perhaps of most even merit in the writing. 'The Small House at Allington' has its backers. There are other favourites, but the discussion is really rather idle. For Trollope is not the kind of artist who comes to a climax in one book. As his people live the whole of their lives, and not in a single great experience, so he as a novelist must be judged by the mass of his work, some three early books and a few pieces of hackwork excepted. Judging him so, we shall not place him with the greatest. With them, however firm their grasp of reality, life becomes in some sort fabulous. They hold with Bacon: 'The world being inferior to the soul, there is agreeable to the spirit of man a more ample greatness, a more exact goodness, and a more absolute variety than can be found in the nature of things.' But a writer cannot be asked to possess incompatible virtues. It is Trollope's unconsciousness of the need of fable, his contentment with life as it is for ordinary people in a particular society and period, that make him in his way and degree a master.

HENLEY ON THE NOVEL

SOME forty years ago W. E. Henley contributed to the *Saturday Review* articles on Dumas and Tolstoy, and looking them over again I am minded to examine his treatment of novelists in general. He was not, indeed,

the spokesman of average opinion in the 'eighties, but he spoke for an important minority, those who demanded mind and art in their fiction and were not complacently insular. He had been a great reader of Balzac, from before the day on which Stevenson took him many volumes, 'impudently French,' in the Edinburgh Infirmary; and he knew French fiction as a whole. In regard to English, he was among those few who were energetic in championship of Meredith, but not, like most of them, blind to Meredith's self-frustrating extravagances. He had joined in that revolt against George Eliot ('the apotheosis of pupil-teachery') which perhaps began with the publication of Swinburne's 'Note on Charlotte Brontë.' In all this, he was one of the elect, not particularly notable among them. What differentiated Henley was his combination of enthusiasm for the Scott-Dumas-Stevenson ideal of romance with devotion to the English eighteenth-century masters.

His position was intelligible, but it had its weaknesses. There is nothing in such criticism by him as I have read to show he realized how many of his standards he dropped when he passed from praising Balzac or Tolstoy to praising Dumas or Fielding. Certain preliminary concessions made, Dumas can hardly be overpraised. The mass and momentum of that prodigious creature, his gusto, his tireless invention, his human warmth, are excuse enough for superlatives. But much of Dumas, and of Scott and Stevenson, is addressed to the boy in us, and it is idle

to pretend that the most genial production under such limitations sets a man among the greatest masters. He is right in calling Dumas 'a natural force'; but he will have it that Dumas is also an artist 'with an incomparable instinct of selection, a constructive faculty not equalled among the men of this century.' Selection for what? And construction of what? Balzac seems for pages at a time to have forgotten that there is such a thing as selection, becoming what Henley called him, 'an inspired auctioneer' taking an inventory. But sooner or later the profoundly significant detail is given us, and when it is we are put in possession of something beyond the conception of Dumas. The construction with Balzac, if we look at his work a piece at a time, is usually careless and sometimes clumsy, but in the end what is constructed is nothing less than the Human Comedy, a world larger and with greater heights and profounder depths and more intricate labyrinths than any other novelist has given us.

But Henley, sharp-eyed as he was, was at the mercy of his temperament. A valiant, swaggering adventurer himself, he could not help over-rating writers who conquered a territory of literature by force of muscle and of cudgel or sword, and he could not help undervaluing those in whom there was no desire to enter the pushing crowd as one of it. To Thackeray he would allow hardly anything except immense skill as a writer. His protest against the pettiness of most of Thackeray's satire was just enough. It is snobbish to be so observant

of snobbery ; it is mean to be so alert in detection of meanness ; and, a very damaging consideration, the end of all that is falsehood to life. Balzac knew better when he showed us the almost lyrical rapture of the miser in miserliness, of the gross person in grossness. The natures that harbour those little vices dwelt upon by Thackeray, they too have their ecstasies, and see their dirty little schemes as glorious strategy. If Henley had looked into Carlyle's letters he would have found a lament that contemporary dramatists had nothing which seemed ' glorious and musical ' to them. It was a wise complaint, and someone might have given it another shape for the benefit of Thackeray. It might have been represented to him, who was reverent enough of virtue, that even human vices have their dignity, without recognition of which no novelist will be dealing fairly with life.

Another trouble with Thackeray which Henley perhaps did not perceive was the extreme, the really intolerable, simplicity of his conception of conscience. Henley called Colonel Newcome the offspring of Don Quixote out of Little Nell, which was well enough ; but he might have found a sharp phrase for the quite mechanical response of so many of Thackeray's characters to a voice which seems less the voice of the character's own conscience than the command of some external, conventional authority. And even in writing of Tolstoy, who at his best had so rare a feeling for the way in which conscience works, Henley is heedless of this matter of motive. He is really happier in the world

of Fielding, where the usual animal impulses act vigorously, under check of the magistracy. Good, hearty, rebellious flesh and a sound work-a-day morality to correct it as far as may be, and if not very far, no matter : that is material the handling of which by a novelist he can best judge.

But no ; there is something of which he is more than a mere judge, of which he is the perfect connoisseur. The most eloquent passage of prose Henley ever wrote was in eulogy of ' The Arabian Nights.' ' He that has the book of the Thousand Nights and a Night has Hachisch-made-words for life,' it begins. It was that vast extravaganza of passion in action and picarooning farce and material splendour run mad which meant most to Henley, naturally. The elements of humour and fantasy in the fatalism of the stories, the mingling of voluptuousness and clowning, the alternations of felicity on silken cushions and the bastinado, were very much to such a reader ; and he is, I think, the only critic who has seen the full value of the figure of Haroun. The fantastic revels proceed under the shadow of a monarch as capricious and almost as powerful as the Almighty, and their wildest delights and most extravagant moments of farce gain by the contrast of that lonely figure, towering above all in ' the tedium of supremacy.'

Since Henley so well saw the value of that contrast, it is strange that he had no word to say of the contrast, contrived *à rebours*, at which Balzac laboured. Around the base of the Human Comedy there runs a frieze of

absurd, excessive, often obscene figures in the complications of fanciful intrigue. It is to throw into greater relief the Human Comedy, but it is not great enough to do that. Perhaps it is rather too much willed for a deliberately chosen purpose, done in completion of one of those elaborate and rigid schemes which the French mind is apt to propose to itself. Whatever the cause, it has not achieved the purpose. Henley should have noted the failure in an attempt congenial to him.

THE VICTORIAN BOOTLEGGERS

Is it not time someone wrote a history of the Victorian bootleggers, the importers of what Tennyson called 'poisonous honey stolen from France'? They did England what some at the time thought a very great injury, and what some later on thought a great service, and what most people to-day think neither the one thing nor the other. This much is certain, that they put into us something of which we can never be wholly rid. 'Baudelaire? Ah, yes, in the 'nineties——.' But it is not a question of what Baudelaire was to the young men of the 'nineties, who mostly misunderstood that inverted and exasperated idealist; it is a question of his permanent effect. And Baudelaire is like the forgotten censer in one of his most beautiful poems: forget him, and he will still continue to affect the

atmosphere of any house of life to which he has once been admitted.

Gautier can do nothing to the soul, the existence of which he never suspected, but he too leaves permanently changed everyone who has read him, for in him alone is modern paganism without fever or affectation. Besides which we had from him what no native writer had ever given us, the assurance that any and every kind of writing can be done strictly in the spirit of the pure artist. And, in their several ways and degrees, most of the other writers, Symbolists or Decadents, who came to us with or soon after Baudelaire and Gautier had something of the power of permanently perfuming or indelibly dyeing all brought into contact with them.

We have ceased to talk about them ; and naturally, for must one not keep up with the young man who finds Proust a dusty classic and the young woman who politely searches her memory for Mr. James Joyce ? But there are few greater critical errors than the assumption that a writer's influence vanishes when people in general have stopped chattering about him. In truth, literary influences are usually most powerful when the labels have dropped off them, when they are hardly recognized, when they no longer incite men to emulation of the particular works from which they emanated but are become constituents of the atmosphere breathed by every man of letters.

A popular living writer of stories once in his rash youth undertook to write a novel in what the English

language would have been if Johnson's Dictionary had been the final record of it. It would be curious to see if any writer, not a manufacturer of serials and the like, could to-day write a book absolutely free from the indirect influence of the French writers introduced to us between 1870 and 1895.

I have said 1870, but smuggling began earlier, and I suppose with Swinburne's consummate defence of Baudelaire in 1862. (Swinburne erred in never reprinting that little masterpiece of sympathetic divination ; and it is one of the tragedies of literature that Baudelaire's noble letter of thanks, discovered in recent years, never reached Swinburne.) As regards Baudelaire, the next two important dates are 1869, when a premature report of his death evoked 'Ave atque Vale,' and 1875, when Mr. Saintsbury printed his long and robustly argued apologia. Gautier's entry cannot, I think, so well be referred to definite dates. The same poet and the same Saturday Reviewer were sponsors, at about the same interval, but there were more allies ; and it may be supposed that the wider public was first acquainted with the *ars poetica* of Gautier in Austin Dobson's admirable paraphrase. Andrew Lang's version, 'The Dead Leman,' of one of Gautier's finest stories should also be noted.

The late Sir Edmund Gosse was also active in the foreign and poisoned beehive business, though, to the best of my treacherous memory for dates, he could claim priority only in the matter of Mallarmé. Mr. George Moore was the first to write in English of

Rimbaud and of Jules Laforgue; the full critical appreciation of those two poets was postponed for five or six years, and came from Mr. Arthur Symons. It was Mr. Symons who, at the invitation of Oscar Wilde, wrote the first English article on Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. There were some unexpected helpers. For example, the musical-comedy rhymer known as Adrian Reed translated at least a couple of Baudelaire's sonnets, and translated them well.

And so the work went on, broadened by various enterprises in translation, notably as regards fiction by the joint effort of Sir Edmund Gosse and Mr. William Heinemann. But a little earlier there had appeared one of those books which, whatever may be the ultimate verdict of criticism on their intrinsic value, must always have a place, even if it be only in a footnote, in any history of late nineteenth-century literature not written by professors: Mr. George Moore had published 'Confessions of a Young Man.'

Mr. Moore gave a copy to Walter Pater, and if one reads between the lines of Pater's acknowledgment to 'my dear, audacious Moore' one can discern the mingled pleasure and discomfiture of the great critic, who revered art too much to acquiesce in irreverence so near to art as the camp of its enemies must always be. The book had a good deal in common with the volume which a few years later Mr. Moore made out of his essays on modern art. It was often crude, capricious, brutal, and ill-informed, but it was also in certain pages subtly sympathetic, acute, independent.

With the air of being a fictitious autobiography, it was Parisian table-talk, talk across a café table, and its enthusiasms were highly contagious, its outbursts provocative. I am sure it had much more effect than has ever been publicly admitted. Its nature precluded the possibility of its continuing to mean a great deal to any individual reader, but it went to the head of relays of readers, and in its way made literary history.

After the 'nineties, largely a period of misunderstanding, many strange and unimportant things happened. Guy Thorne, God help us, translated Baudelaire, the author of 'When It Was Dark' giving Stet in another capacity the opportunity of quoting

Scrawled after blind even-song.

The champions of a literature they had not understood died out or became commonplace. But something never to be undone had been done; and we read our own literature differently for the experience, finding a new Baudelarean quality in Hood's 'anywhere, anywhere out of the world' and a Mallarméan suggestiveness in Keats's 'one faint eternal eventide of gems.'

BONÆ SUB REGNO VICTORIÆ

I HAVE been faithful to thee, Victoria, in my fashion. *Non sum qualis*; the world has altered since you died; new sins are in vogue, and only the elders whose hair has uncurled ever sigh now for absinthe. But the

operation of time is equitable, and if no poet of the 'nineties is now valued for his familiarity with absinthe and the alcove, none is morally reproached on those accounts. The case for the defence does not read excitingly now, but the case for the prosecution has become positively tedious.

Sir William Watson was probably the weightiest witness for the prosecution, with his taunt that *he* had not paid the world 'the evil and the insolent courtesy' of offering it his 'baseness as a gift.' But the question between him and those other poets was not quite what he supposed: it was the question of a recognized, estimable, formal gift or one which, whatever might be said against it, was distinctively the donor's. The portraits of himself which Sir William Watson has given the world are like too many of the portraits done by Watts. The real man is there somewhere, but involved in the too ample folds of a ready-made dignity. Reticence here, generalization in a manner above the occasion there, and everywhere a dread of what would date the picture or seem too slight for the National Gallery have resulted in 'Portrait of a Poet' rather than 'Portrait of Sir William Watson.'

To be sure, Sir William Watson was not alone in his period in using the garb of ceremony. What is Lionel Johnson, a scholar and priest of poetry rather than in the full sense a poet, if not ceremonious? But with Lionel Johnson the vestments are really expressive, of his strictly characteristic aspiration if not always of what he was; just as the elaborate and precise lies he

told, without varying a word even when completely drunk, about the conversations he had never had with eminent or saintly personages were expressive of experiences to which he was entitled. We are all, or all except the luckiest of us, the paying guests of a Barmecide, and such a man as Lionel Johnson differs from us only, and for the better, in at least choosing for himself the dishes and the wines that will not be there instead of acquiescing in the honey-dew and milk of Paradise which are the table d'hôte of the unperforming patron. Lionel Johnson, not least in his lies, gives us himself. And so does Ernest Dowson, whose Horatian and Propertian symbols were only part of his shy, well-bred way of telling his secrets without embarrassing himself or his audience.

Looking through the well-edited and charmingly-produced anthology of 'Nineties Verse which Mr. A. J. A. Symons, the bibliographer and bibliophile, has made, it is impossible not to be impressed by the truth that the best poets of the 'nineties wrote neither as if for a committee of anthologists, which used to be considered wise, nor as if for the traditionless, which is now considered very clever. I am impressed also by another truth, that they wrote in the sense one painter will say of another that he paints. For a contrast, look at our Mr. Masfield, who has so many striking gifts, and is so excellently adventurous, and who can never keep at the one distance from life throughout the one poem, having apparently persuaded himself that Spenser and Zola are possible collaborators.

But it is not necessary to come down to the present day. As ill-luck would have it, the poet of the 'nineties who had the broadest and most urgent impulse, John Davidson, lacked just those qualities which distinguished Ernest Dowson, Lionel Johnson, Mr. Arthur Symons. He had a remarkable personality and rare talents, but was always trying on styles, and even what is probably his chief success, 'A Runnable Stag,' is an amalgamation of the stock hunting ballad, by Whyte Melville or another, with Poe, an unrepeatable *tour de force*, not the discovery of a basis for a style of his own. By further ill-luck, the most uplifted, in a sense the most inspired, poet of the period, Francis Thompson, wasted himself for the most part in trying to write at once like two masters so incompatible in everything but religion as Crashaw and Coventry Patmore. But those others, whatever the purely poetic value of their poems, were writers of rare skill, of a scrupulousness rarer in our literature.

I am not sure, however, that the point cannot be better made with reference to smaller and less persistent writers of verse. It is not by sheer luck that so many of the contributors to Elizabethan song-books wrote each one or two lovely songs ; that a Court rake of the Restoration would manage once or twice in his life of busy idleness to do what no one of the Prince Regent's boon companions could do ; that during part of the eighteenth century every fifth man in a company of gentlemen could point to a set of good album verses. Such phenomena testify to a state of affairs in which

literary good breeding is part of the ideal of conduct among all the members of a class or clique, whether at Court or with no more royalty than the Café provided in the 'nineties. Look, then, at the trifle by Mr. Victor Plarr, which Mr. A. J. A. Symons, remedying a discreditable neglect, has included in his collection :

Stand not uttering sedately
 Trite oblivious praise above her !
 Rather say you saw her lately
 Lightly kissing her last lover.

Whisper not, ' There is a reason
 Why we bring her no white blossom ' :
 Since the snowy bloom's in season
 Strow it on her sleeping bosom :

Oh, for it would be a pity
 To o'erpraise her or to flout her :
 She was wild, and sweet, and witty—
 Let's not say dull things about her.

The rendering of light pathos, of light love, of ephemeral and artificial beauty, with a fine concern for fidelity to the experience, slight or perverse as it may have been, that was part of the work of the typical poets of the 'nineties, and it was a real service. For poetry is always in danger of being dominated by respectable, capable, serious writers with large, imperfectly realized themes and that rhetoric which imposes on all but the best judges.

The worth of the poetry of the 'nineties can be well enough estimated from the anthology. I think its editor should have included H. P. Horne and Mr.

Selwyn Image, scholarly and decorative craftsmen in verse, having a good deal in common with Lionel Johnson. I think, too, that he would have done better by Lord Alfred Douglas, whose collected verse has recently appeared, if he had printed, in addition to the fine sonnets, that lament of the man who, having forsaken Apollo for Christ, seeks in vain to revert, and 'Perkin Warbeck,' which in its expression of an artistic self-pity is comparable for a moment, I will dare to say, with so great a thing as 'Richard II.'

Then, I must regret encouragement of the old view of Mr. Arthur Symons, which might have been corrected by printing the poignant 'Crying of Water' and that piece, 'At Tarragona,' in which the burden of identity is apprehended in so novel and subtle a way :

If I could know but why this care
Is mine and not the care of man . . .
Why, knowing not from whence I came,
Nor why I seek I know not what,
I bear this heavy separate name
While winds and waters bear it not.

Lastly, though I think the inclusion of the finest poet of the period, Mr. Yeats, has no spiritual justification, I can only wonder that in drawing on him the editor ignored the one thing perfectly pertinent, that elegy on these very poets :

You faced your ends when you were young,
'Twas wine or women or some curse.

But the book will vindicate the 'nineties as an epoch in which the typical poets, small though most of them

were, could at least write, and did at least write out of their searchingly discriminated experience. For myself, but this is sentimentality and no longer criticism, I will even spend a sigh on the substance or pretext of their work. Absinthe, I protest, is almost as old-world and romantical as mead or metheglin, and I find a charming simplicity in the picture of the Café waiters flickering to and fro. O my Beardsley and my Dowson long ago ! They have put an organ in your Café now. *Non sumus* ; new gods are crowned in the city ; they have conquered, the jazz Georgeans ; yet I kneel not, neither adore, but standing look to the end.



KU-429-543

